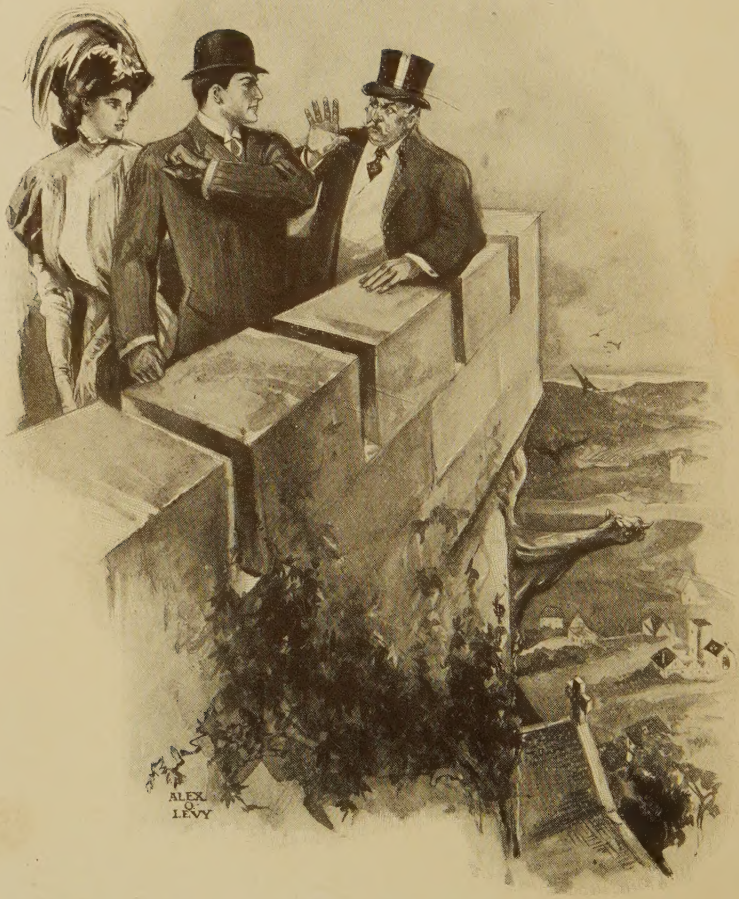
Eccentric Philanthropists

EDGAR JEPSON

Geo T. Marion



Only by the most violent effort could I refrain from hurling Sir Reginald into space.—Page 160

The

Four Philanthropists

By

Edgar Jepson

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THE FOUR PHILANTHROPISTS

CHAPTER I

WE FORM A COMPANY

"OURS are wasted lives," said Chelubai earnestly.

Chelubai often says things like that, and always earnestly. As a rule I ignore them with some firmness; but this time I said, "Speak for yourself."

"Of course you're a barrister, and that counts for something. I was thinking rather of Bottiger and myself. Ours are wasted lives," said Chelubai.

"Speak for yourself," said Bottiger sharply.

"Well, they are," said Chelubai stubbornly—"rounds of pleasure."

"If you think that walking up those partridges yesterday in that biting east wind and sleety drizzle was a round of pleasure, you're jolly well mistaken!" said Bottiger with some heat.

"Of what benefit were your exertions to Humanity?" said Chelubai.

"Oh, ask another!" snapped Bottiger, who was in one of his shorter tempers. The wind was still in the east.

I said nothing. When the good New England ancestry gets a grip on Chelubai and fills him up to the brim with the real and earnest, it is best to let him unload in his own way.

He looked from one to the other of us mournfully. I looked steadily and ruefully at the three sovereigns, the four shillings, the sixpence and the seven halfpennies which I had idly piled in a neat column on the table, and which, thanks to a week's bad luck at Bridge, had to last me for sixteen days. I gazed at them steadily, for I did not mean to have my eye caught by Chelubai. With equal resolution, Bottiger scowled out of the window at the myriad pigeons which disport themselves in the King's Bench Walk.

Then Chelubai began:

"Look at our lives—just wasted," he said. "Here we are, young, active, brainy, and we waste all our powers in unprofitable amusements. Look at me: I rise in the morning, I eat a large and varied breakfast and read the paper. Then I go down to the garage and look over my cars. If it's not too wet and muddy, I drive out thirty miles and back to get an appetite for a large and varied lunch. Then I play Bridge all the afternoon to get an appetite for a large and varied

dinner. After dinner I go to a theatre, or a music-hall, or a dance. Then I go to bed and sleep like a log. Of course my spirit goes out on the astral plane, and I've no doubt it is engaged in important activities, so the night's all right. But what a day—a hog's life. What good am I to Humanity? "

" None at all," said I cheerily, as he paused.

I knew that his eye rested on me severely, but I did not meet it; and he went on, " Look at Bottiger." I looked at Bottiger, and saw him harden his back. " Bottiger rises in the morning and eats a large and varied breakfast——"

" I always begin with porridge," said Bottiger in a tone of sturdy defiance. " I make a point of it."

" And go on to fish and meat and eggs and bacon and toast and marmalade," said Chelubai, and his tone grew more accusing with each item. " Then he reads a sporting paper, and sends off his man with a wire to his bookmaker. Then he goes to Richmond and plays golf all the morning to get an appetite for a large and varied lunch. Then he plays Bridge all the afternoon to get an appetite for a large and varied dinner. Or he goes shooting, killing harmless birds and beasts with weapons of precision—a barbarous occupation——"

" Barbarous? " cried Bottiger wrathfully. " I

should like to see you bring down a pheasant coming along high with the wind!''

"A savage would do it with an arrow, and you have a weapon of precision,'' said Chelubai.

"Oh, would he? Would he?'' said Bottiger, apparently choking.

"But that isn't the question,'' said Chelubai firmly. "Look at the life—a hog's life. What good are you to Humanity?''

An inarticulate, gusty rumbling came from Bottiger.

"Look at Roger,'' Chelubai went on, without heeding it; and I looked at myself with patient expectancy in the slanting Venetian mirror. "He rises in the morning——''

"If it will really oblige you, Chelubai, I'll try to go to bed in the morning,'' I said kindly.

"He eats a large and varied breakfast——''

"He does not—one simple dish, it's all it runs to,'' I said with quiet firmness.

"Then he goes across to the Law Courts, and as often as not perverts the course of Justice by saving a hardened criminal from the just punishment of his crimes——''

"Oftener—oftener than not. You have to take the sweet with the bitter at the Bar. If you don't save the guilty, you never get a chance of saving the innocent,'' said I.

"Then he eats a large and varied lunch——''

"Never," I protested warmly, "unless someone else pays for it, at least. It doesn't run to large and varied lunches."

"Then he plays Bridge all the afternoon to get an appetite for a large and varied dinner."

I contented myself with a short, sardonic laugh —a very good sardonic laugh.

"Then he goes to bed and sleeps like a log. What a life—a hog's life. What good are you to Humanity?"

"You forget I'm a socialist," I said brightly.

"Talk—rubbishly talk about Utopias," said Chelubai.

"Not at all. I'm an honest gas-and-water socialist," I said with unbroken calm. "But what are you driving at? What's the conclusion?"

"The conclusion is that we're wastrels—cumbering the ground. Anyone who cleared us off the earth would be doing Humanity a service," said Chelubai solemnly.

"Well, to oblige you, we'll let it go at that. We're useless cells in the social organism. What of it? What do you want us to do? Or have you only been letting off steam to get a better appetite for a large and varied dinner?" said I.

"We must change all this," said Chelubai solemnly; and he sat down.

"Change away," said I. "But do not demand anything Spartan or Tolstoyan from me and Bot-

tiger. We are children of our age, don't you know; and it's the twentieth century."

"Well, you admit that you've a duty to Humanity and you're not discharging it?" said Chelubai cautiously.

"Humanity's a vague bird; but, just to please you, we'll admit that we ought to boost him up into the Empyrean. Eh, Bottiger?"

Bottiger grunted; but whether he was expressing contempt for Humanity or mere indifference to the whole matter, I could not tell.

"Well, I'll give you my idea," said Chelubai. "I've thought it out, and I've come to the conclusion that the whole principle of the anarchist removals is wrong. They are always clearing off figure-heads—kings, queens, presidents and ministers. In some countries that's all very well—in Russia or Germany, for instance. But it's no good in advanced, civilized countries like the States, or England, or France. What's the good of removing a king or a president in such countries? The proper people to remove are the financiers and captains of industry. They're the real criminals, preying upon humanity."

"I see. Instead of removing a king of a country, they should remove a King of Beef, or a King of Pork, or a Grocer Prince," said I.

"Exactly," said Chelubai.

"It is doubtless a very sound principle. But

as a Socialist I abhor violence," I said sternly.

"For goodness' sake, don't go dragging in your beastly Socialism!" cried Bottiger, fuming. "It's enough to have to listen to Chelubai's gassing without that!"

"I trust I shall always introduce my Socialism in season and out of season," I said with firm pride.

"But can't you stick to the matter we're discussing?" said Chelubai somewhat plaintively.

"As a good Socialist, I trust that I cannot. But fire away; develop your idea."

"Well, my point is that it's no good establishing a reign of terror among figure-heads. The thing to do is to establish a reign of terror among the real evil-doers, the people who prey upon Humanity under the shield of the law," said Chelubai.

"A very sound idea," I said. "But where do we come in?"

"We remove them," said Chelubai enthusiastically.

"Why, it's murder!" cried Bottiger.

"It's nothing of the kind," protested Chelubai warmly. "It's just the non-survival of the morally unfit."

"It's not for you to kick at murder, Bottiger," I said severely. "In your case it would merely be a natural reversion to type. Those old Bot-

tigers, whose memory you cherish so warmly, murdered up and down the north of England and the south of Scotland for generations. It's your ancestral profession."

"Oh, get out!" said Bottiger curtly.

"Well, what do you say? It's the chance of a lifetime I'm offering you," said Chelubai eagerly. "It's a real, dandy, sporting way of benefiting humanity, the very line for brainy, muscular young men like ourselves."

"Hark to Chelubai," I said. "Under the influence of genuine enthusiasm he has put off the new Englishman, and is again the racy son of the land of Freedom. Listen to his adjectives."

"Was I? I didn't mean to," said Chelubai, depressed.

I am bound to say that no one tries harder or with greater success than Chelubai to be a cultivated English gentleman. For years, indeed, we believed his name to be Charles, till accident revealed to us the crime of his godfathers and godmother; and even now we always call him Charles before common acquaintances.

"Well, well, it's an excellent idea," I said quickly, to cheer him. "And, as you say, we're the very men to carry it out. All brain and muscle—you, Chelubai, the active brain, with years of remunerative hustling behind you; Bottiger, our rough diamond." Bottiger snarled, "One

of the Buller breed." I dodged a book he threw at me. "Amateur light-weight boxing champion; and myself—the—the legal brain. We certainly could carry the idea out."

"I thought you'd see it," said Chelubai eagerly.

"And we do rather cumber the ground; and sometimes—chiefly in the silent watches of the night, when the excess of lobster is battling valiantly with too much champagne—our consciences are pricked by the thought that we do precious little to justify our existence."

"Oh, oftener than that—a good deal oftener," said Chelubai. "Why, you yourself, though you rot more than any man in London, you're very keen on your socialism, and you do get quite mad about the misery and waste of life of your East-enders, when you've been down there in the winter to distribute the money you drag from Bottiger and me. Oh, we often feel that we're wasters, don't we, Bottiger?"

"I can't say that I think much about it," said Bottiger uneasily.

"Yes, yes; that's all very well. But do our prickings of conscience hurt us to the point of driving us to risk our necks?" said I.

"But the beauty of it is there's practically no risk," cried Chelubai, again enthusiastic. "Who would connect us with any of the removals? What possible motive could we have for removing a

financier? We shouldn't know him to have a down on him. We shouldn't gain in any way by his death. We're not in want of money. Every one knows that I'm a well-to-do citizen of the United States. Bottiger's one of the richest British baronets, and you're a rising young barrister. Who on earth would connect us with any of the removals?"

"Certainly you've worked this out. That's a strong point—a very strong point indeed," said I. "There would, of course, be very little risk."

"Murder will out," said Bottiger, with gloomy satisfaction. Bottiger is also one of the most British of the British baronets.

I turned on him, and said severely, "Chelubai has explained to you once that it isn't murder—it's removal." Then I turned to Chelubai and said, "I'm afraid, you know, that it is not so much the passion for humanity that makes you so enthusiastic about this scheme of yours; but it's your idle life that's beginning to pall. You want to get hustling again."

"Why don't you take to golf, as I'm always telling you to?" said Bottiger.

"No, it isn't that at all," said Chelubai earnestly. "I want you to promote the universal brotherhood."

"Well, but do you think that your scheme will

do much good? Of course it's very attractive. I can't think of a more delightful occupation than that of removing the so-called captains of industry. But will a few sporadic removals really establish a reign of terror? You must remember that with all the will in the world we should only be able to murder—I mean remove—a few of them."

"Every little helps," said Chelubai. "It will do some good."

"Well, as I say, I'm an honest gas-and-water Socialist; and when I set about improving things, I want to get a little forrarder; and you can only get forrarder on practical lines. This scheme is too Utopian for me—if it were going to bring in money it would be different. You can do a good deal for humanity with money," I said.

"No, no; let's keep it on the high plane," said Chelubai. "Don't let's spoil it with anything mercenary. Besides, it can't be done. Introduce the money element, and you make it risky at once."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind the risk if it meant actually getting a little forrarder," said I; and I leaned back in my chair and tried to find some money-making aspect of the scheme.

"I never knew such beggars for getting bees in your bonnets as you two," said Bottiger.

"Wait a bit—I'm beginning to see it. Look

here, have you ever considered the matter of heirs?" said I.

"Airs? Whose airs?" said Bottiger.

"Heirs—inheritors," said I.

Chelubai looked puzzled; Bottiger turned to him, nodded towards me and tapped his head with an expression of commiseration. It was an incautious action, for it enabled me to catch him on the side of the head with a chunky work of Hall Caine's—good, thick value for 4s. 6d. I had it to review.

"You must have noticed that the heirs of the monied are pleasant, decent sort of people, while the monied themselves are generally sweeps," I went on, while Bottiger rubbed the little Hall Caine memorial the great work was raising on his head.

"I've nothing against heirs," said Chelubai peaceably.

"Well, even in the business of furthering the progress of Humanity the laborer is worthy of his hire. Those heirs want that money, and they want it badly. It would be better for the world that they should have it, because they're more decent people than the people who have it now. But it is only fair that they should subscribe to the improvement of the world, since they chiefly and directly benefit by it."

"That's so," said Chelubai.

"Now you're off on another tack. Are you going to waste the whole afternoon gassing? Are we never going to get to the club?" said Bottiger plaintively.

"Now the financiers and Grocer Princes and such other enemies of Humanity whom Chelubai proposes to remove are all monied people. To be a really effective enemy of Humanity you have to have money, and a good deal of it."

"I begin to see," said Chelubai, brightening.

Bottiger yawned with a good deal of needless ostentation.

"They have also heirs," I went on. "Remove the captain of industry, and his heirs get his money. They must pay for the accommodation."

"And they wouldn't kick at paying either," said Chelubai.

"It increases the risk, because the heirs will have to be taken into our confidence somewhat. But it increases the reign of terror. We could easily give the inheriting nephew a hint that he'd better employ his money better than his dead uncle, or he would not live long to employ it at all. His hints—and he'd have to hint; he couldn't help it—would spread the reign of terror."

"We could get over the risk pretty easily, because there are three of us," said Chelubai. "The man who would settle with the heir the terms of

the removal would not take a hand in the removal himself."

"Yes; that would get over the risk a good deal. But it's not the risk which bothers me, but the difficulty of getting subscriptions from those who benefit by our philanthropic action. Nine men out of ten who have the strength of character to permit the removal of a monied and rascally uncle would also have the strength of character to refuse to subscribe after that removal. On the other hand, the offer to remove the said uncle implies a certain strength of character in us; and none but the very foolish would subscribe before the removal, lest, having received the subscription, we should be content to let the matter rest there."

Chelubai's face flushed with genuine feeling. He held out his hand; in the stress of emotion dropped into his own racy vernacular, and said, "Shake! I see that it's going to be a real pleasure to work with you, Roger. I knew that you were brainy; and now I see that you've the real philanthropic head! You've put your finger on the weak point in the scheme right away." He wrung my hand with genuine emotion, and went on with enthusiasm: "But people with lofty aims like us are not going to be beat by a trifle like this. There are ways of getting subscriptions; and we'll find them. There are I O U's, bills and postobits—oh, there are ways!"

"We should hardly tell those we proposed to benefit, incidentally, that we were philanthropists," said I.

"Not on your life! They'd never subscribe if we did," said Chelubai. "Hard-headed men of business would be our line."

"And we must bear in mind that we have fear on our side," I said.

"Of course we have," said Chelubai.

"How fear on our side? It is we who will have to be afraid since we do the removing. I don't understand," said Bottiger.

"Well, if we display sufficient strength of character to remove a monied uncle, the presumption is that we shall display sufficient strength of character to remove a thankless nephew. At any rate we can make the thankless nephew fear it."

"And it *is* fear, you bet," said Chelubai. "Once in Shanghai I knew a man who bucked against a Chinese secret society. "The Good Sons" it called itself. And I tell you that when it began laying for him that man would have paid up seventy-five cents of every dollar he had to square it; and he did not part easily. Oh, he was ready to squeal. He was frightened enough. Yes, sir."

"Observe the fruits of enthusiasm," said I. "Chelubai is once more his country's idiomatic son."

Chelubai blushed, but he said bravely: "Well, as long as we're engaged in earnest work, I guess I'd better be. I think easier and quicker."

"What became of the man?" said Bottiger, with all the readiness of one of the leisured classes to let his attention stray from the matter in hand.

"They outed him in the end. He didn't wake up one morning; and when his servants looked into the matter, they found a knife in his ribs," said Chelubai.

"Poor beggar!" said Bottiger.

We were silent a while, giving Chelubai's suggestion careful thought; then I said, "What about methods?"

"Yes, we've figured out the subscription part of the scheme—roughly. We may as well consider methods a while," said Chelubai.

"Taking into consideration the incompetence of the average doctor, there's a good deal to be said for poison. But the worst of it is, the enemies of society can generally afford specialists. And after all poison is really rather a method of domestic removal, and even in the cause of Humanity we should hardly care to be on such intimate terms with a financier or captain of drapery as to have easy access to his house. We shall have to content ourselves with violence," I said.

"There's nothing like knifing," said Chelubai simply.

"What about gun accidents?" said Bottiger, breaking from the gloom into which our philanthropic discussion had plunged him, and speaking with all the keen animation of a sportsman.

"Gun accidents are good," I said in an encouraging tone.

"And accidents in railway trains, and motor-car accidents—all accidents are good. And there is a good deal to be said for the sand-bag; and I learnt in Singapore the thug dodge of strangling a man with a handkerchief. It's very cute," said Chelubai, warming to the subject.

"I have a rough idea for a portable lethal chamber," I said.

"Oh, we shall have no trouble about the actual working of the enterprise," said Chelubai cheerfully. "It's only the financial side of it—the subscriptions—that is going to give trouble; but, as I've said, we're brainy, and we shall get over that. The thing is, are we going into it in an earnest, whole-souled way? I'm ready to, for I believe it'll get up on it's heels and prance into success."

"I'm ready to," I said. "I'm all for practical philanthropy; and this is practical."

We looked at Bottiger.

"If you fellows are really keen on it, I suppose I am. We must hang together," said Bottiger gloomily.

"We must do nothing so foolish!" I said with asperity. "On the contrary, let us make it our strenuous endeavor to live to see statues of ourselves in all the large towns of the Anglo-Saxon world."

"Well, that's settled," said Chelubai. "But this new financial element modifies the scheme as I'd originally figured it out. I think we ought to form a company to work it."

"Form a company? Whatever for?" said I.

"Well, the scheme as I originally envisaged it was pure romance. But you've come along with your socialism and made it practical and business-like. Now, if you're going to work it on those lines, there's nothing like a company. Why, if anything went wrong, even in this hide-bound old country, they couldn't hang a company," said Chelubai.

"But there's the matter of capital," said I, looking at my little all on the table."

"Oh, that's all right," said Chelubai. "Fifty one-pound shares apiece will be enough. And I'll hold yours for you till you can take them up. You can't object to my doing that, though you never will let me lend you as little as a tenner when you run short."

"Thanks," said I. "I shall be very much obliged."

"And we ought to have a good name for it.

The name's so important in a company," said Chelubai.

"And as for the matter of payments for the company's work, they'll have to be fixed, the amount that is, with each job. They'll vary," said Chelubai.

"I prefer to call them subscriptions," said I.

"I don't see how you can in business," said Chelubai.

"Never mind, then," I said with a sigh. "But at any rate they'll be high."

"Sure," said Chelubai. "Expert work like this—and we the only firm doing it. They'll be high; we can make our own prices—and we will."

"By Jove, if I only could get hold of three or four thousand! Why, we could take the house next to our Children's Hospital in Jamaica Place, and fit it up with thirty beds! I know a score of little beggars who ought to be in hospital at this minute. By Jove!" said I, warming as the possibilities of the scheme flashed upon me.

"I can let you have a hundred. I've done very well at racing lately," said Bottiger quickly.

"So can I," said Chelubai.

"Thanks—thanks—I could do with it well. But thousands! Just think of it! Thousands! Oh, let's get the company started at once!" said I. "Why, we could have a house in the country, too—for convalescents!"

"Well, the company is practically started. We've only got to find a job," said Chelubai in a soothing tone.

"I tell you what," said Bottiger, "I've got an idea. Why shouldn't we begin with that fellow—what's his name? The swine who got old Chantrey's money out of him in some beastly company, and made the poor old beggar blow out his brains. Old Chantrey was very decent to me when I was a boy. I've been trying to think out a way of getting at the infernal sweep for months. Let's begin with him. What's his name? You know, Roger."

"Pudleigh—Albert Amsted Pudleigh," said I.

"That's the man. Let's out him for a start," said Bottiger; and I had never seen him moved by so eager an animation.

"He would be an excellent subject for our first operation. There's not only old Chantrey; but a few months ago he swindled an orphan out of a Granite Company by means of the Companies' Act and her idiot trustee. I could not even advise her lawyers to take action, the swindle was so legal. I should be delighted to begin with Albert Amsted Pudleigh. But there's a drawback to him."

"What's that?" said Bottiger quickly.

"He's a Whole-Hog Wapshot; and his relations, if he's got any, would be too pious to pay for his removal."

"What on earth's a Whole-Hog Wapshot?" said Bottiger.

"The late Mr. Wapshop founded one of those little Calvinistic sects which flourish in the suburbs of our great city. A Whole-Hog Wapshot is a follower of the late Mr. Wapshop. Pudleigh is one. There will be no subscription for outing him," said I.

"I don't think we ought to hamper ourselves by the fact that we shan't get paid for removing some one it's our duty to remove. We should divide them into paying enemies of Humanity and non-paying enemies of Humanity. The paying enemies of Humanity will of course have the preference; we will remove them first. But we ought not to divert our attention from this Albert A. Pudleigh, because his relations won't pay for his removal," said Chelubai.

"Very well," I said. "We'll begin with Pudleigh. At any rate, it will get our hands in for some paying enemy of Humanity," said I. But I was disappointed; I thought of that Hospital.

"Wait a bit," said Chelubai. "Why shouldn't we be paid? These business men don't work alone; he's sure to be one of a gang. And there are plenty of business emergencies when some one in a gang would cheerfully subscribe to the removal of another of the gang. We'd better go into the matter of Pudleigh, and at once. I'm

all in favor of an early operation. It clears one's mind, and sets things really going. Let's get to work on Pudleigh; but let's get to work on him as a paying proposition."

"Very good: Pudleigh it is," said I. "To-morrow I will go and see Morton, one of the firm of lawyers who had the business of the granite quarry orphan in hand, and learn all I can about Pudleigh."

We were silent a while, considering. Then Chelubai said: "Well, we seem to have got things pretty well fixed up. I can't see anything else to arrange at present. Let's go along to the Club and get a rubber. And on the way we'll call in at the Savoy and talk to the manager of the Restaurant about giving us the right kind of dinner to inaugurate our change of life."

"I should have thought that since we are becoming definitely 'Champions of Humanity,' we ought to set about leading the simple life," said I.

"Not a bit of it," said Chelubai firmly. "The strenuous life if you like. But, any way, we'll have a farewell dinner to the old, easy life of wastrels."

He discussed the dinner with the manager with the thoughtful care the matter called for, and we went on to the Club. I did not abate my usual points, for I could fall back on Chelubai or Bottiger if I lost. But I won.

The game gave us an excellent appetite, and

we came back to the Savoy. We were putting a fine edge on that appetite with some oysters when I observed that Chelubai seemed thoughtful and absent-minded, and asked him what ailed him.

"It's the trade-mark," he said. "We never fixed on a trade-mark. It's most important, a good trade-mark for a company."

"How would a blood-stained hatchet and the motto 'Advance Humanity' do?" said I.

"Excellent," said Chelubai. "Excellent. You do have good ideas, Roger." And he became at once bright and cheerful.

CHAPTER II

THE GENERAL PHILANTHROPIC REMOVAL COMPANY MAKES A BEGINNING

We had the excellent dinner our careful thought in choosing it deserved, and some bottles of excellent wine, which we drank to the success of our effort to further human progress. The next morning I found my mind dreamy and musing, hardly in condition for the hard thinking needful to proceed fittingly with so august an enterprise. But I made shift to go to Lincoln's Inn Fields about eleven, assured that a short contact with the practical Morton would brace my wandering mind to its normal power of concentration. A long intimacy with him had taught me how good he was for it. He was an old friend of mine; we had been at Oxford together; to him I owed most of my briefs; and they would have been many more had he not been only a junior partner in a firm which affected old counsel.

But even before I reached his wholesome presence I was stirred from my dreaminess. As I drew near his door, there passed me a young girl—a very pretty young girl indeed. In any case she

would have attracted my admiring attention, but she made a singularly vivid impression on my mind in its receptive condition. I saw with that clearness of vision which sometimes comes of nerves a little irritated, that her large eyes were bright with hardly-restrained tears, that her lips were pressed together out of their natural fulness to check their quivering, that her slender, pliant figure drooped and that she walked with a heaviness out of keeping with her years. Indeed, my plastic mind received an amazingly full and intimate picture of her, one likely to abide in it for a long while. I stood on the steps of Morton's office and looked after her. She went into the gardens and sat down.

I went into the office and sent in my name to Morton. A clerk ushered me quickly into his room, and I saw at once that his usual placidity had been ruffled, and that he was in a bad temper.

We exchanged greetings. I sat down and said, "I have come to talk to you about Mr. Albert Amsted Pudleigh."

"You have, have you? I've just been talking about him, hang him!" said Morton, with pleasing but unprofessional warmth.

"If you once come across a man like Pudleigh, you're always coming across him. What has he been doing now?"

"It's still that Pavis business, the Quorley

Granite Company. There's nothing to be done in it; it's in his pocket, and there it must stay. But the present bother is that Miss Pavis won't let us try to recover from the estate of her late trustee; and do what I will, I can't persuade the obstinate little mule to change her mind. She says that his family are poor; and he thought that he was acting for the best; and if she can't have her own money she won't have theirs. I'm a good deal worried about her, for I'm sure she must be at the end of her resources. Well, well; what do you want to know about Pudleigh?"

"I want the name of his richest enemy."

"I don't suppose he's got a rich enemy. He only robs the poor; he hasn't the pluck to rob anyone else," said Morton thoughtfully.

"The poor are no use. I want his rich enemies. I suppose I shall have to try his friends, the men he works with. I know he's a confederate of some of our choicest Kings of Finance. Do you happen to know his present accomplices?"

"At present he is foisting a Fertilizer Company on the idiot British speculator; and Gutermann and John Driver are his confederates. Gutermann is a very timid native of Hamburg and John Driver is one of the bluffest rascals in the city of London. Indeed, they call him Honest John Driver, on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle."

"He sounds like the man I want," I said thoughtfully.

"What are you going to do? What do you want with Pudleigh? He's a most dangerous man; you'd much better keep out of his way," said Morton, with some anxiety.

"I have in my mind a little deal I might do with him."

"A little deal he will do you with!" said Morton sharply.

"I think not. I have a great belief in honesty," I said quickly. "Even the astute Albert Amsted Pudleigh must bump his head against it—sometimes."

"You'd much better let him bump his head against some one else's honesty. He doesn't bump it often."

"My honesty is harder than most people's. It will hurt him more."

"You're such an obstinate beggar. But I do wish you'd listen to me just this once, and leave Pudleigh alone," said Morton, almost fretfully.

"It's very good of you to be so anxious about me, but I'll be careful," I said, rising.

"Much better let it alone. But there, he can't do you much harm. You haven't enough to lose for him."

"What I have is very precious to me," I said. "Good-by, old chap, many thanks for your information."

"I wish it had been a couple of briefs," said

Morton. "I keep dinning into the ears of my poor old men that you do your work better and cheaper than their old fossils; but they are set in their groove."

"Oh, that's all right, my dear fellow. Wait till you're a senior partner; I shall wallow in work. Good-by." And I left him.

When I came out of the house I went through the gardens in the hope of seeing my pretty vision once more; but she had gone. I went back to the Temple and into the chambers of a friend who supplemented his briefs by incursions into the city. He chanced to know all about the new Fertilizer Company, and told me the very thing I wanted to hear—that it had been floated with such success that even now the directors must be on the point of dividing the spoil. He could not give me an introduction to Driver.

I took a hansom to the city and tried my stockbroker, and after him I tried a West African director of my acquaintance. Neither of them could give me the introduction I needed, so I took another hansom and drove to Chelubai's rooms in Jermyn Street.

I told him what I had learned about Pudleigh and the Fertilizer Company, that the Directors were on the point of dividing the spoil. He, too, was somewhat slack; and before discussing the matter he mixed a couple of brandies and sodas.

We drank them, thoughtfully, and then he said: "I see how it is; when your friends talk of the directors dividing the spoil, they mean that they are going to unload their holdings and sell the shares they have in the Company."

"I suppose that's it."

"And, of course, the fewer who unload, the better the price they will get."

"That's so."

"Well, you have shown excellent reasons why John Driver should be willing to pay handsomely for the removal of Pudleigh."

"Yes; but the nuisance of it is, I can't get an introduction to Honest John Driver. I've tried the three likeliest people I know."

"You've a poor idea of business, Roger," said Chelubai sadly. "You don't need an introduction to a man you can do something for. You can go to him straight and make your offer. If he likes it, he accepts; if he doesn't, he refuses, and no harm is done."

"It's a curious offer to make, you know."

"I don't see it. In business no offers are curious. They are good or bad. This is a good one; and if Driver is really a first-class King of Finance, he will see it at once."

"But I should put myself in his power a good bit. I don't want him going about and saying that a rising young barrister came and offered to re-

move one of his financial accomplices for a consideration. I wanted to sound him first."

"H'm. You hit a weak point there," said Chelubai thoughtfully. "It certainly would do you no good professionally, except in financial circles. It seems to me that I, an independent American gentleman with a good knowledge of business, could make the offer much better. We Americans have the reputation for being fresher in our methods. What's our customer's address?"

"209B Old Jewry."

Chelubai pulled out his watch, and said: "Ten minutes to one. I'll be off at once; I may catch him, and get him to lunch with me. If the gang are on the point of unloading, there is no time to lose. He will probably want the business done quickly. He might even want Pudleigh removed to-night. While I'm making the proposition to Driver, will you try and get some information about Pudleigh, his habits and customs?"

"Very good," I said.

We hurried down into a hansom. Chelubai dropped me at the beginning of Fleet Street and went on to the city.

I went into the Bodega, and, as I had expected, found there the man I wanted—Gregson, a financial journalist, who always knew the swindles of the moment, and their workers. He was willing

enough to forego the liquid lunch of the Bodega for the cooking of the Savoy; and we strolled down the Strand to it. The mere ordering of the lunch expanded him; and my close and flattering attention to his latest stories, and to the personal reminiscences awakened by each, expanded him yet more. He was in the full flood of talk, and we had just finished our fish, when, to my surprise, Chelubai came in, bringing with him a very large, flabby, clean-shaven man, whose face wore an expression of frank honesty so ostentatious as to be almost brazen. I knew that he must be Honest John Driver himself. They went to a table at the far end of the room out of my sight.

Gregson was by now in the proper relaxed mood; and, carelessly enough, I drew him on to talk of Albert Amsted Pudleigh. His eyes brightened at the name, and he related many incidents in that worthy's financial career with no little enjoyment. It seemed that it had been his practice for many years to promote companies, wreck them, put the fragments in his pocket, and reproduce them in a very lively, flourishing condition. The Quorley Granite Company was one of a dozen. Slowly he had risen to the rank of two hundred thousand pounds, and might be expected to figure as a knight in one of the earliest lists of Honors. For he not only occupied a prominent position among the gentry of East Surbiton, but was a good

subscribing imperialist, like his friend, Honest John Driver.

"Oh, he's a friend of that great financier, is he?" I said.

"He is, indeed," said Gregson. "They are working that gorgeous plant Amalgamated Fertilizers."

He drank some wine with a thoughtful air, and went on: "But there is a darker side to the picture, alas! Our Albert Amsted is by way of being a gay dog. He is not always off with the old love before he is on with the new. At present he is riding hard for a breach of promise case; he is carrying on with an East Surbiton widow and also with a young lady, very much a young lady, of Stoneleigh Street, Vauxhall. Consequently, he is no longer the regular attendant at his snug East Surbiton home he used to be. He is no longer domesticated."

I was deeply shocked to hear this—the least one expects from a financier is domesticity; and I felt that Albert Amsted Pudleigh had established yet another claim on the stern offices of the philanthropists.

At about half-past four we finished our lunch. I bade good-by to Gregson, and walked up into Holborn to buy the materials for my portable lethal chamber. For the purpose of collecting butterflies, should it ever become my hobby, I bought

two small bottles of chloroform from different chemists. At a draper's I bought three yards of thick, strong cloth, a packet of large needles and some black thread. At an ironmonger's I bought ten yards of strong copper wire. Then I returned to the Temple, and set about the painful construction of my invention. I am no mechanic.

First of all, I made a noose of twisted wire large enough to slip easily over the normal human head. Then I made a bag of the cloth about two feet deep and sewed it on round the noose. I am no seamstress; so I sewed it on very firmly. Then I sewed a strip of the cloth round the noose inside the bag, so that the wire could not bruise the neck of the person whose head was in the bag. Then I worked and worked the noose until I could draw it tight very easily.

I had just finished, and was regarding my contrivance with a modest but not ill-founded pride, for, as I say, I have no natural mechanical genius, when I heard Chelubai's knock at my door.

I let him in, and, sitting down in an easy chair, he lighted a cigarette and lay back with the air of a man who has done a good day's work.

"Did you work it?" I said.

"I worked it. I have arranged our first operation. But I tell you that it will be a peculiarly sunless day on which Honest John Driver gets left. The idea of removing a financial accomplice

was new to him; but he tumbled to it like a brick from a scaffolding. He saw his way to scooping up Pudleigh's share of the Fertilizer boodle before you could wink twice; and it was merely a matter of haggling about terms. I had a fight to get him to make it two thousand; and Pudleigh has to be removed before Monday."

"Two thousand seems a poor subscription towards the removal of a financier," said I. "But, by Jove, it will make things look up in Plaistow! Of course we're only starting in philanthropy; and I suppose we must be content with small beginnings."

"As long as we are doing the actual work ourselves we may make up our minds that we shan't be getting large subscriptions. You only obtain large sums when other people are doing work for you, and you are seeing that they do it. Still it's no good grumbling, though it is depressing to see brainy men like us doing our own philanthropic deeds, when there are so many people, in and out of gaol, ready and waiting to do them under our direction. Philanthropic labor is so cheap, too," said Chelubai, and he sighed.

"Never mind," I said. "We must have time. We can't expect to succeed in a great mission in a day. Let us be thankful that we have made such a good beginning."

"Don't be too hopeful about the beginning.

We've not collected the subscription yet. You prefer to call it subscription, don't you? Honest John Driver has at present no more intention of subscribing towards the removal of his friend than he has of flying. We've got a double job, you may take my word for it—we've got to remove Pudleigh and scare the subscription out of John Driver."

"I expect you're right. These commercial men have no sense of decency. But didn't Driver kick at the idea of removal?"

"Not a kick. He was on to it like a knife. But what about Pudleigh? Have you found out his habits?"

I ran through Pudleigh's *dossier* as I had received it from Gregson. But when I came to the story of his flirtations, Cherubai's sense of propriety, which is so much keener in the inhabitants of the Great Republic than in us, was touched on the raw. He flushed with honest indignation, and broke in:

"This is disgraceful! I cannot stand immorality in a business man. It frets me every time."

"But there's no immorality. Gregson assured me that they were mere flirtations."

"It is immoral," said Chelubai firmly. "Any trifling with the affections of a woman is an attack on the sanctity of the home!"

"I didn't know you felt so strongly about it."

"I do," said Chelubai. "And I tell you that any qualms I had about the poor time Pudleigh's spirit would have, because of the cutting short of this incarnation, have vanished—yes, sir, vanished utterly."

"This is very satisfactory, for, from my point of view, too, even if we were not bound to remove him for his financial crimes, it would be our duty to Humanity to remove him to discourage hypocrisy."

"That's true, too," said Chelubai. "But what's your idea for removing him? Since he's a man like this, I don't want to waste any time."

"A gentleman in the neighborhood of the Oval about midnight surely presents himself as subject for removal by the sand-bag, or perhaps by my portable lethal chamber."

"What's that?" said Chelubai.

I showed him my contrivance with all an inventor's pride, and explained to him that you poured a bottle of chloroform into the bag before slipping it over the subject's head, and after the operation left the bottle of chloroform by his or her side to produce the impression of suicide.

Chelubai examined it with grave attention, and worked the noose with thoughtful care. "Yes," he said. "This has points. It's an excellent idea —excellent." I flushed at the flattering verdict. "But I think it's more adapted to a removal in

a quiet country neighborhood than in the great Metropolis; it would take time.''

"Then," said I, "we will make it the sand-bag for our Albert Amsted Pudleigh."

CHAPTER III

THE COMPANY'S FIRST OPERATION

I am bound to confess that, admirable and worthy as our scheme for benefiting Humanity seemed to be, eager, too, as I was to double the Children's Hospital, I had never believed that it would find expression in action. I had reckoned without Chelubai. His philanthropic instincts were aroused to the promotion of the Theosophic ideal of Universal Brotherhood; and his sense of humor was not of a character to suggest to him any doubts as to the method of compassing that excellent ideal by the forcible removal of Captains of Industry. His business instincts were aroused to making a practical success of the Company. He had already begun to talk of it with a veritable fatherly affection. His instincts once aroused, he had in him a store of active earnestness which would not let him rest till he had satisfied their legitimate, or illegitimate, cravings. I believe it is the basic trait of his energetic race. Moreover, during his business career so far east of Suez, he had learned to hold human life cheap. He drove Bottiger and me along; and I realized very quickly

that whatever else happened we were certainly going to attempt to remove Albert Amsted Pudleigh on the first convenient occasion.

Chelubai kept us hard at work at our preparations; and it was pleasant, healthy work. In the mornings we practised the use of the sand-bag and the noose-bag, as we agreed to call my portable lethal chamber. We banged away at a small mark on the wall with the sand-bag, learning to judge the distance from which to strike with the full swing of it. We took it in turns to slip the noose-bag over each other's heads. It was a much more difficult instrument than the sand-bag, but it worked well. Even the unchloroformed had a lengthy struggle to get it off: twice out of every thrice it proved impossible to get off till the man working the noose chose to loosen it. Above all, we satisfied ourselves that it did not easily mark the neck. On the whole, we were very pleased with it.

We practised also the use of the knife and the strangling trick of the thugs which Chelubai had learned from an old member of that brotherhood who was spending his green old age at Singapore. It was much more difficult than either the sand-bag or the noose-bag; for we could not practise on each other's necks lest we should diminish the number of the Company. We were forced to make shift to practise on the leg of an inverted arm-

chair, a poor substitute for the human neck, so that we were doubtful of attaining sufficient skill in it to justify its use.

Bottiger had the healthy-minded young Englishman's aptitude for games, and was indeed always playing them. It was little wonder then that, keen fisherman as he was, he soon excelled us at the use of the noose-bag—as early as the third day, when he plied it, there was no getting it off. In the use of the sand-bag Chelubai easily held his own, it being a national weapon. But Bottiger's superiority to us in the use of the noose-bag exercised a happy influence on his disposition, and wore away his gloom—he was eager to remove Pudleigh, but he thought the philanthropic motive an affectation. The noose-bag made him feel, I think, that he was combining sport with philanthropy; and a philanthropic career, thus raised to a practical level, was no longer revolting to his common sense. But even so, he was as yet hardly as enthusiastic a philanthropist as I could have wished.

We also set about arming ourselves with drugs, in case domestic removal should ever come within the scope of the Company's operations. I had set my heart on atropine; but it is no less difficult to obtain than to detect. I decided that, as an American, Chelubai had a greater power of sustained application than myself, and I induced him to pur-

chase a book on the diseases of the eye, and set about mastering all the symptoms which demand the use of that drug, that he might feign them, and have it prescribed for him. We needed, too, a good hocussing drug; and while Chelubai and I were debating how to find a doctor of sufficient scientific attainments to be able to give us the formula, Bottiger, in a somewhat shame-faced way, told us that he knew a doctor as able as he was drunken; and he was sure that for a couple of guineas he could get from him what he wanted.

It was an easy enough matter to buy false beards which would look like natural growths in the dusk or the dark; and we also bought noiseless boots, in the soles of which little pads of india-rubber had been fixed to deaden the foot-fall. It went rather against the grain to wear ready-made boots; but we had no time to have them made for us. Indeed, it seemed to me dangerous to have them made to measure, for neither a respectable barrister nor a respectable baronet really needs noiseless boots. These we bought from a strange bootmaker. Chelubai made no bones about it; he assured us that both in the United States and Shanghai it was the custom to wear ready-made boots.

Having thus equipped ourselves for our philanthropic enterprise, and having decided to use the sand-bag, we allowed Fortune to choose who should

strike the mere blow. We took a pack of cards, shuffled it in turn, and having decided that, as at the reputable games of chance, the lowest should deal—I mean strike—we cut. For my part, I cut with a singular uneasiness, and turned up the five of clubs with a veritable but unworthy thrill of dismay. Bottiger cut the knave of clubs, and I heard with some disgust his gasp of relief. Then Chelubai cut the three of diamonds, and my heart lifted. It seemed to me that Fortune had shown very good judgment in choosing him, for he was more expert in the use of the sand-bag than I. I took it as a happy omen.

"Chelubai's luck," he said mournfully. "But after all I might have cut a spade; and I shouldn't have liked that. Spades are so unlucky; but diamonds are all right." And his face grew brighter.

I made haste to get us whiskeys and sodas. Both Bottiger and Chelubai were a little pale, and I fancy that I was, too.

We did not spend all our time on practice and equipment. We examined Stoneleigh Street, and at four o'clock in the afternoon we went down to Pudleigh's offices in the city and set ourselves to learn his movements. First we made the reluctant Bottiger call upon him and inquire into the advantage of investing in Amalgamated Fertilizers. Then, when he left his offices at five, Bottiger pointed him out to us.

Even if I had not known him to be a robber of the orphan, his looks afforded every justification for his removal. He was a bulky, fat man, six feet high, with greasy, copper-colored, clean-shaven face, double chinned, hook nosed and thick lipped. All the baseness of the world shone from his little pig's eyes, so that a philanthropist, who had really the courage of his philanthropy, might easily have shot him at sight without a qualm.

He was easy to dog and we dogged him. Since the weather was fine, I even found it an exhilarating task, and filled with a sense of kinship with all the detectives famous in fact and fiction, we followed him to Waterloo Station, journeyed down to East Surbiton in the same train, and conducted him, at a distance, to his pretentious many-gabled villa. We watched over this till ten o'clock, and then, sure that he was domesticated for at least this night, we returned to town and supped with Chelubai.

On the Wednesday and Thursday we did this, shod with our noiseless boots, with our beards and our sand-bags—we all went armed lest Chelubai's blow should fail—in our pockets. On the Friday, when Pudleigh came out of his office carrying a little black bag in his hand, he seemed to me to wear another air, a gay and jaunty air. He blew his nose in a swaggering way, walked to the Mansion House and took a white 'bus. It was a still

and muggy evening, but he went inside; we climbed on to the top of it.

Chelubai said, "I think our time has come."

"It looks like it," I said.

"I'd better be off then," said Bottiger eagerly. It was his task to go home, send away his man early and sit there, so that, if need were, we should be ready with an alibi.

"Not yet," said I. "Let's be sure that he is not going home."

Our quarry did not get out at Piccadilly Circus as we had expected, but went on to Oxford Circus, and got out there. He stood on the curb looking about him; we looked into two or three shops, and presently a young woman of a trying, suburban type, anæmic and over-dressed, joined him. They turned and walked along Oxford Street.

"Now you can go," I said to Bottiger; and he hailed a hansom with a look of joy quite unseemly, seeing that he left us to the harder work.

Chelubai and I followed our quarry and his companion at a distance of twenty paces, and presently I saw that Pudleigh under the stimulus of gratified vanity, induced, doubtless, by his companion's striking appearance, and doubtless, too, by the warming sense of being a devil of a fellow, had begun to strut. I was disgusted, and pointed out to Chelubai that a man who could strut in Oxford Street, and that in the company of an over-

dressed female whom he had no definite intention of marrying, had indeed no right to live.

I fancy that my conscience was setting itself at ease by painting Pudleigh in as black colors as possible. It need not have been at the pains; he was destined, and at once, to paint himself in blacker colors than any I could have found for him, for a hundred yards down Oxford Street he turned with his companion into a noxious Italian restaurant of the half-crown dinner type—he was worth two hundred thousand pounds.

Chelubai and I stopped short, exchanged one glance of extreme disgust, and followed them gloomily into it. Confronted by a half-crown Franco-Italian dinner—French cooking by Italians—our fine enthusiasm was damped, our fine joy in the philanthropic endeavor fled, a cold resignation reigned dully in our hearts. We did not dare to look at the *menu,* but awaited the coming of the food in a painful silence. For my part, I no longer regarded Albert Amsted Pudleigh from the lofty, impersonal, philanthropic point of view; a savage bitterness against him began to seethe in my heart. I watched him and his inamorata with a cold malignity; and when I saw that she affected "the perfect lady" and minced, I wished that she had been included in our contract with Honest John Driver. The lingering delicacy with which she ate her food was terrible to see. They dallied

with that dreadful meal, with the sour soup, the stale fish, the dry but Siberian pheasant, the thin-set ice; they drank champagne with it. All the while Albert Amsted Pudleigh gurgled and leered at her with a tireless energy, and she minced back at him. Their horrible, undisguised satisfaction with the food, with the plushed and mirrored room, and with one another was as revolting a sight as I have ever seen. As a rule I find the joys of the vulgar infinitely pathetic; the joy of this pair, on the top of the Siberian pheasant, made me loathe the human race I was about to benefit.

We had eaten our dinner, or rather as much of it as the necessity of being fit for our work and our strong sense of our duty to Humanity could thrust down our throats, and were trying to soothe our outraged and clamorous stomachs with some powerful Trichinopoly cheroots I happily chanced to have with me, when we saw Pudleigh paying his bill, paid ours and came out of the restaurant before them. We came out of it with every morsel of human kindliness wrenched from our hearts. We were rather beasts of prey than philanthropists; and I saw Chelubai bare his teeth in the snarl of a tiger, a man-eater, as he felt in his hip pocket to assure himself that the sand-bag was really there.

We crossed the road and watched our enemies come out and walk along the street. They insulted

us by walking with the air of people who have dined well. We followed them; and so strong was our feeling about that Franco-Italian half-crown dinner that insensibly we fell into the stealthy gait of beasts of prey.

In their state of exaltation they seemed inclined to take exercise, for they walked to the Charing Cross Road and turned down it. I saw Pudleigh tilt his hat to a more rakish angle, and he put his arm through that of his companion. Suddenly a horrible foreboding seized me that he was going to deal us another blow. It was only too well founded: they turned into the King's Theatre of Varieties.

A drawing-room entertainment on the top of a Franco-Italian dinner was too much for us. I groaned in my anguish, and the sulphurous language of Shanghai came bubbling from Chelubai's lips. We must have been the best part of a minute pulling ourselves together; then we went into the grand circle. We stopped in it long enough to assure ourselves that our enemies had found seats, and that the perfect lady was mincing still; then Chelubai led the way to the American bar. Three whiskey sours braced us to the point of returning to our duty, and standing within hearing of that drawing-room entertainment. Then at the end of a song I was caught up short by hearing Pud-

leigh laugh—it sounded like a man gargling with salad oil.

I turned to Chelubai and said: "Is the rascal never going to get into a quiet corner where we can knock him on the head?"

I must have spoken with impatient ferocity, for Chelubai said: "For God's sake, do nothing rash! You can't expect an exalted mission like ours to be easy."

"Easy!" I groaned. "The King's Palace of Varieties on the top of a Franco-Italian dinner!"

"After all, it might have been Slatty and Gaiter's," said Chelubai.

I had not thought of that, and it quieted me. A succession of gymnasts and the ventriloquist of my childhood reduced me after a while to a state of apathy not far removed from imbecility. But at last the entertainment came to an end, and the jostling crowd revived me again to the philanthropic pitch.

Our enemies came out before us and stood on the curb waiting for a hansom. I took Chelubai by the arm, thrust him into the first that came, and bidding the driver drive to Vauxhall Station, jumped in after him.

As the cab started Chelubai said: "I don't like this. We ought not to lose sight of them."

"Tell the driver to follow their cab, I suppose, and provide a witness who could not only swear

to our being near the scene of the removal, but to our having followed the removed man there," I growled.

"You're right," said Chelubai.

I sat back in the cab nursing my grudge against Pudleigh; and, thanks to the exasperating evening he had forced on me, I found myself very much less moved and excited than I had expected, now that the hour of strenuous action was upon me. As for Chelubai, the admirable national coolness stood him in good stead. He took the sand-bag from his pocket, and dandled it fondly while he made sure that it was fit for use.

When we came to Vauxhall Station, we paid the cabman, walked sharply through the station, came out on the other side into the Harleyford Road, went up it to the Oval, and turned into Stoneleigh Street.

It was empty, and Chelubai said: "Suppose they took a faster cab, and Pudleigh's gone?"

"No chance of it," I said, with assurance.

We took our stand at the mouth of the little lane in the middle of the street, for we did not know the house in which the inamorata of Pudleigh lived, put on our false beards and waited. Seven or eight minutes dragged by, and for all that I had made up my mind that the world would be better without Pudleigh; they were the slowest and most uncomfortable minutes of my life. Now

and again Chelubai jerked nervously on his feet, and every time my heart jumped into my mouth. I wanted very badly to say something cheerful, but for the life of me I could not find words. Besides, my mouth was too dry.

Then a cab clattered into the street, and drew up only a few doors from us. Our enemies got out of it, and a bitter altercation about sixpence followed. I found it very tiresome indeed, for I was burning to get the business over, and it had the happy effect of making me again furiously angry with Pudleigh. At last the cabman, worsted, whipped up his horse and went up the street; half way up it he stopped his cab and shouted back: "Eyetalian! Dirty Eyetalian!"

"What impudence!" we heard the lady say.

"I don't notice those fellers," said Pudleigh superbly.

"How brave you are, Albert!" said the lady. "I am always afraid of them."

"I fancy that I can take care of meself," said Pudleigh. And though I could not see him, I knew well that he spoke with the great air.

"I'm sure you can," said the lady.

Some embracing followed. Then the lady opened the door with her latch-key.

"One more 'ug, ducky," said Pudleigh. We heard the sound of a smacking kiss, and the door was shut.

We peeped out, and saw Pudleigh looking at the door. He chuckled greasily, turned on his heel and went down the street.

"It's up to papa," said Chelubai in a shaky whisper; and we came out, and followed him swiftly on noiseless feet.

He waddled along, and we caught him up under the palings of the Oval. As I passed him I knocked off his hat with a smart tap of my cane. He turned his face to me, and said, "What the——"

There was a thud, and down he went.

I stood staring at him stupidly, and Chelubai hissed in my ear: "Be smart! You go that way, I'll go this."

I looked at Chelubai, and with some half-formed notion of preventing the identification of Pudleigh, stooped down, caught up his bag and strode off down towards the Harleyford Road, dimly aware that Chelubai was hurrying round the Oval the other way.

At the corner I looked back, and saw that Pudleigh, lying in the shadow of the Oval palings, was hardly visible.

CHAPTER IV

I PLAY ANOTHER PHILANTHROPIC PART

I WENT round the corner, slowed my hurrying steps to a gait less likely to attract attention, and became aware that I would have given a good deal for a glass of brandy—the Franco-Italian dinner is no foundation for strenuous action. A sudden diversion distracted me from the consideration of my feelings; the door of a house some twenty yards ahead of me opened, a girl came out, or was thrust out, on the steps; a harsh voice cried, "Out you go! I won't 'ave no beggarly 'ussies in my 'ouse renting rooms they doesn't pye for!" And the door banged to again.

Unmanned as I had been by the Siberian pheasant, I seemed to snatch at this diversion of my thoughts, stopped short, and with extreme care watched the girl stagger down the steps, and stand at the bottom of them looking this way and that, pull herself together with an effort plain even to my dazed mind, and take her way slowly down the street. I followed her; her figure and the thick plait of hair which hung down her back seemed familiar to me; but my mind was in such

a whirl after my recent philanthropic effort and the ventriloquist of the King's Palace of Varieties that I could remember neither when nor where I had known her. However, my mind was not so dazed but that I understood that I had to help her; and as I went under a lamp I pulled my money out of my pocket that I might pay for her night's lodging. I found that I had only a sixpence and some coppers, and the shock cleared my wits.

The girl went under the railway arch, turned on to the embankment and crossed the road. I whipped off my beard, thrust it into my pocket and came up to within ten yards of her. She did not hear my gutta-percha foot-fall. She went to the parapet, and looked over it into the river. I made ready to catch hold of her if she should try to climb it, but she stepped back, drew herself up and went on with a defiant air. I followed her, trying to make my mind work clearly enough to devise some way of helping her—the difficulty was that not only were the sixpence and the coppers all the money I had with me, but there was very little at home. The girl walked along bravely enough for some twenty yards, then she began to droop, and I heard a little sob burst from her.

I caught her up, raised my hat, and said: "I beg your pardon, but I'm afraid you're in trouble. Can I help you?"

She turned on me the startled, woe-begone face of the pretty young girl I had met in Lincoln's Inn Fields on my visit to Morton, looked at me with earnest, scrutinizing eyes, opened her mouth as if to speak, and shut it again.

"I saw you come out of the house just now, and heard what the woman said. I thought perhaps you didn't know where to go."

"I don't," she said in a faint voice.

There came a gust of wind and a patter of rain, and I awoke to the fact that she was wearing a light summer frock.

"What on earth are we to do?" I cried. "I'm nearly broke for the time being. What a stupid fix!"

"I have no money at all, or I shouldn't have been turned out of my lodgings," said the girl bitterly.

Another burst of rain warned me to be quick and do something.

"At any rate, come out of this!" I said. And I hurried her back to the shelter of Vauxhall Station.

She came quickly, and we faced one another in the light of the station lamps. I saw that her face was haggard and gaunt, and her eyes were dim. I stared at her in my perplexity, trying to find a way to help her. I could only think of my spare bedroom at the Temple.

"Well," I said, "I see nothing for it but that you should accept my hospitality. I have a spare bedroom in my chambers at the Temple. Will you let me put you up?"

She shivered, wrung her hands, and her eyes filled with a horrified dread.

"I suppose it must be that," she said huskily, "since I won't drown myself. And I won't—I won't!"

It seemed a strange way of accepting a well-meant offer of hospitality; but I said, "Good, come along."

It was past the hour of trams and omnibuses, and we had something of a walk before us. When I found that she did not walk very steadily, I gave her my arm, and helped her along. Fortunately, though now and again there was a sharp patter of rain, it was not enough to wet us much. I did not bother her with talk; once or twice I said an encouraging word. The stretch from Westminster Bridge to the Temple was the most difficult, and we went very slowly. I put my arm round her and helped her along. Three steps up my stairs she clutched at me to prevent herself from falling. I picked her up and carried her to the top.

I opened the door of my rooms, helped her into them, and set her in an easy chair. Then I made haste to get her food. Fortunately, there was a

tin of soup and half a cold chicken in the cupboard. I set the soup on the stove, and while it was warming I spread the cloth, and set out on the table the chicken, bread and butter and a cake. I brought the soup to her in the arm-chair. She took the first two or three spoonfuls in a very feeble way. Then she grew stronger, finished it quickly and turned hungry eyes on the chicken.

"I don't think you ought to eat much straight off," I said doubtfully. "When did you eat last?"

"This morning," she said in a stronger, clearer voice. "I had a penny loaf."

"Then you may safely have a moderate meal," I said, and drew a chair to the table for her.

I carved some chicken and cut some bread for her, bade her eat very slowly, and watched her with a good deal of pleasure. I had never seen any one so hungry. I opened a small bottle of Burgundy and poured her out a glass. Then I sat down at the table and helped myself to some chicken; that Franco-Italian dinner had proved as innutritious as unmanning. I would only allow her the one helping of chicken, two slices of bread and butter and one of cake. But that took the gauntness out of her face.

When we had finished, I begged her to sit in the easy chair again, took the easy chair opposite to her, with her permission lighted a cigarette,

and began to talk to her—or rather, to be exact, I tried to talk to her. It was a most difficult business. She seemed frightened out of her wits, she trembled, she stammered confused answers; her face was now a burning flush and now dead white. Then, of a sudden, she buried her face in her hands and burst into a storm of sobs.

"What on earth's the matter?" I cried, starting up; and then in a flash I knew the reason of her confusion and dread.

"Hang it all," I cried, bitterly mortified, "I'm not such a cad as that! I don't take advantage of a starving girl."

She let fall her hands, raised her head and looked at me with questioning, unbelieving eyes. "I thought—I thought—" she muttered. "London is a wicked place. I've—I've always heard so. And I've been here three months—several times men have—have spoken to me—" She stopped with a kind of long sigh, and fell back in a dead faint. I suppose it was sudden relief on the top of an ecstasy of terror.

I ran for water and sprinkled it on her, then I poured some brandy into her mouth with a teaspoon. She was so long coming to that I grew rather frightened; but her pulse, though slow and weak, beat steadily. When at last she did come to, I gave her some more brandy, and she lay back very still, looking at me. I could not stand her

eyes, they made me uncomfortable—something very like an ecstasy of gratitude, very discomfiting, shone in them; and all for nothing at all.

Presently she moved a little in the chair, and I said at once: "Now I think that bed is the best place for you; and we will arrange your affairs in the morning. Do you think you can manage to get into it?"

"Yes, I think so," she said faintly.

"Or, I tell you what. You lie on the top of it, and get to sleep. When you wake, the food will have got hold of you, and you'll feel stronger."

With that I picked her up, carried her into the bedroom, laid her on the bed and covered her with a rug.

"There," I said. "You put in a good night's rest, and you'll be another creature in the morning. Good-night!"

"Good-night, and I'm so much obliged—and—and—so sorry. I—I ought to have seen," she stammered.

"That's all right; that's all right. Good-night," I said hastily, and came out and shut the door.

I came into the sitting-room, filled a pipe, lighted it, and sat down to consider my windfall and its responsibilities. In the midst of this consideration I was disturbed by a rapping on my oak, low, but fast and nervous. The sound brought

back Pudleigh's removal to my mind in a very disquieting fashion, and with a lively foreboding of evil afoot I went and opened it.

Outside stood Bottiger, scared and nervous.

"You are here!" he cried. "You've given us a devil of a fright! We thought the police had got you!"

"By Jove! I quite forgot I'd arranged to come round to your rooms," I said, snapped the oak to, and led the way into the sitting-room.

As luck would have it, the first thing that caught Bottiger's eye was the girl's hat lying on a chair.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he cried. "Of all the coolness! You come straight back from murdering a financier to this kind of thing! Well, of all the coolness!"

"It's my sister's. I found her waiting for me on the landing. She's run away from school," I said, lying valiantly.

"I never knew you had a sister," said Bottiger.

"Ah, one doesn't talk about one's womankind to all the men one knows," I said nastily.

"I don't believe it is your sister's," said Bottiger, and he eyed the hat suspiciously.

"Look here, what you want is your neck wringing! We can't all be in Debrett. It is my sister's. If you come round to-morrow, you'll see," I said truculently.

"Murder does your temper no good, that's

clear," said Bottiger. "Are you coming round to my rooms?"

"No, I'm not. Not now. It's too late. What's the use? And I wish to goodness you would not call a strenuous philanthropic enterprise murder!"

"Very well. But Chelubai says you carried off a black bag from the body—a senseless thing to do. I'm to take it away and destroy it."

I had forgotten Pudleigh's bag. I took it up from a chair, and tried to open it. It was locked.

"We may as well see if there's anything of interest in it," I said; and I took a screw-driver from a drawer and forced the bag open. There were half a dozen papers in it, and I tumbled them out on the table.

"I shall look through these carefully," I said. "There may be something here that will give us a hold on some King of Finance. It would be in the highest degree unphilanthropic to miss a chance of extracting reluctant subscriptions from those enemies of Humanity. Besides, it has always been my ambition to hear a financier sing, and it might turn out another effective method of obtaining subscriptions to the hospital. Here's your bag," and I tossed it to him.

He caught it, saying with some irritation: "You seem to be growing perfectly grasping."

"Not perfectly—at least not perfectly yet—but

I hope to become a perfect money-grubber in the interests of that hospital, now that I've been started on that course," I said firmly.

Bottiger growled, put a lump of coal from the scuttle into the bag, shut it and said: "I'm off back to Chelubai to set his mind at rest. It's just like you to leave us anxious. You never think of anyone but yourself. I'll go out of the Tudor Street entrance and chuck this beastly thing into the river."

I went with him to the door, bade him good-night and returned to my easy chair. Once more I set about considering how to help the girl. I had devised no method, when my eye fell on Pudleigh's papers. I reached for them and looked them through one by one. There was a share certificate for 12,000 shares in Amalgamated Fertilizers, another share certificate for 2,000 shares in Barnato Consols, a paper of memoranda concerning a company evidently in process of promotion, and a document which excited my liveliest interest and not a little wonder. It was a transfer of 40,000 shares in the Quorley Granite Company from Dudley Wedgewood, whom I remembered to be the late idiot trustee of Morton's client, Miss Pavis, to Albert Amsted Pudleigh, for £200. I could not for the life of me see what it was doing in Pudleigh's bag. Either it ought to be in the safe or the bank of the Quorley Granite Company,

or Pudleigh had not yet had the shares registered in his name though the transaction was months old.

I foresaw that I was going to put Pudleigh's executor to a good deal of trouble, hunting for these documents; but I crumpled up a newspaper in the empty grate, laid the certificates and the memoranda on the top of it, put a match to it, and burnt them to very fine ashes. The granite share transfer I locked up in my safe, and promised myself to give Morton a hint to refuse to admit that the shares had ever passed out of the possession of Miss Pavis and to insist on the production of the transfer, so that if anything were ever made of the property she would get her share of it.

I went to bed with a strangely even mind, no longer troubled by thoughts of the Siberian pheasant or of Pudleigh. Later events had left but little room in my mind for musing upon his fate; I was thinking about my guest.

I soon fell asleep, and slept soundly until I was awakened next morning by the noise of Mrs. Plimsoll, my housekeeper, banging her broom against the furniture in her efforts to sweep the sitting-room. I called to her to wake my sister and show her the bathroom; then I lay in a pleasant drowsiness, reflecting gratefully that £2,000 would very soon be in my hands for the Children's Hospital, and trying to remember exactly which children

must first go into it, till I heard my guest come out of the bathroom and go back to her bedroom; then I rose, bathed and dressed.

When I came into the sitting-room I found her sitting in the easy chair, and she greeted me nervously and shyly. She seemed to me in her bright morning freshness prettier than ever. I asked her to pour out the tea, and we sat down at the table. I asked her how she felt, and whether she had slept well, remarked on the beauty of the morning and prophesied fine weather. My indifferent talk soon set her at her ease, and she joined in it presently without constraint. I found it exceedingly pleasant to breakfast with so charming a companion, for I am not of those who come to that meal unamiable, and I made no secret of my pleasure. She flushed very prettily at my frank expression of it.

The more I saw of her face the more I delighted in its beauty. Her mouth indeed was a little large, but her admirably curved lips were not thin, her square chin was well-moulded, her nose was straight and her brow broad. Her large gray eyes met mine with a resolute frankness, and a fine spirit looked out of them. Above all, she had one of the delightful voices I love, a voiee full of tones pathetic with all the woe of the world.

When we had finished our breakfast and Mrs. Plimsoll had cleared the table, with my guest's

permission I lighted my pipe, and set about the discussion of her situation.

"I've been thinking it over, and the awkward thing is that I'm very hard up at the moment," I said. "In a fortnight I shall have plenty of money, and then I can really help you. How would it be if, till then, you remained my guest? It's awfully awkward and compromising and all that, but I take it you don't care to appeal to your friends and relations or you'd have done it already."

"I have no relations," said the girl quietly. "And no friends—at least only poor ones, and they live in the north of England. And it's awfully good of you to want to help me like this. But I have no claim on you. Why should you do this for an absolute stranger?"

"That's neither here nor there. We needn't discuss that," I said with some haste. "I'm only too happy to have the chance. And I'm sure you'd do as much for me, if the positions were reversed. The point is that I don't see how to keep you without running the risk of your being compromised."

"Compromised?" said the girl, with a bitter little laugh. "If it hadn't been for you—" And she stopped short with a bitter, frowning face.

"Well, well, we'll consider that settled," I said hastily. "And I think we can make it fairly safe, if you will take the relationship of sister to me

for the time being, and only see friends whom I can trust to hold their tongues if ever they learn that you're not."

"You're awfully good. But—but I don't see how I am ever going to repay you."

"There will be nothing to repay," I said quickly. "I shall really be very pleased to put you up. It will be a very pleasant change from the loneliness of the bachelor life."

I suppose that my honest admiration warmed my heart or my voice, for she blushed as she shook her head and said, "It's all very well to say that, but——"

"Oh, nonsense; there is no but," I protested, cutting her short. "So we'll take it that you'll be my sister for the next fortnight."

"I should like that," she said softly. "I should like it very much." Then she looked up at me with troubled eyes. "You see, I've been so worried and anxious the last three months, and especially the last fortnight, that—oh, I should like a rest!"

"And you shall have one," I said cheerfully. "And to be my sister you'd better know something about me. My name is Brand, Roger Brand; my father had a small estate in Lincolnshire, which my brother Ferdinand inherited. During the last five years I have been a comparatively briefless barrister, living on the somewhat slender portion

of a younger son. You had better have run away from your school at Dresden and be taking refuge with me. If you say something now and then about the Fen country, and abuse the Germans, it will clinch the story."

"I see," she said, smiling; and then her face filled with discomfort. "I—I ought to tell you that I know something else about you. I overheard what your friend said last night about your —your having murdered some one."

"The deuce you did!" I cried; and I filled with dismay, for I did not wish her to have a poor opinion of me.

"I couldn't help it—he talked so loud."

"He roared like a bull of Bashan! Hang him!"

"I don't mind about it," she said quickly. "If you—if you murdered anyone, I'm sure you had a good reason."

"Oh, yes, I had a good reason," I said, and I lay back in my chair, thinking quickly.

There was no doubt that Bottiger might have put us in a very awkward and dangerous position. Yet I had no fear that the child would deliberately betray us; I had the firmest faith in her loyalty; but how could one trust to the perpetual discretion of a young girl? She could not be more than sixteen or seventeen. I could not see my way at all. Then an inspiration came to me to tell her the truth.

"The fact is," I said, "I and two friends have formed a Company for the purpose of removing objectionable people in the interests of Humanity. We look on it entirely from the philanthropic point of view. It is our hobby."

She nodded her head gravely, and said: "It sounds rather out of the way, and rather dreadful. And—and last night—you—you murdered a man?"

"Well, I helped one of my friends knock a rising King of Finance on the head."

"You didn't knock him on the head yourself?"

"No; I knocked his hat off."

"Oh," she said, with a sigh of relief, "that makes all the difference."

"Yes, it does, doesn't it?" I said quickly, though for the life of me I couldn't see where the difference came in.

"Who was it?" she said, with a much brighter face.

"A rascally swindler, called Pudleigh."

"Pudleigh?" she cried. "Not Albert Amsted Pudleigh?"

"That was the rascal's name."

Her beautiful face turned savage, and she said: "Oh, I am glad. I *am* so glad!"

"You're glad?" I cried, beyond measure astonished. "Why—why—you must be Miss Pavis!"

"Yes, I'm Angel Pavis."

CHAPTER V

WE CO-OPT A FOURTH DIRECTOR

I STARED at her—I shouldn't be surprised to hear that my mouth was open—amazed at the way in which Pudleigh had brought us together, trying to see the bearing of this new fact, when in burst Chelubai and Bottiger.

"I've seen Driver, and told him that Pudleigh is out of the way, and he can unload double the number of Amalgamated Fertilizers as soon—" cried Chelubai, stopped short and pulled off his hat.

"Let me introduce you to my sister—Sir Ralph Bottiger, Mr. Kearsage. Go on, Chelubai. My sister knows all about our philanthropic effort. Bottiger told her all about it," I said dryly.

"Me!" cried Bottiger.

"Yes, you. You told her in a shout, when you came round last night, that we had committed a murder—a nice way to speak of our earnest endeavor to further human progress. It's a good job only my sister heard. You might have told a stranger. Let it be a lesson to you not to talk so loud about philanthropy."

Bottiger was plunged into extreme confusion.

"How—how on earth could I know?" he muttered.

"Well, well, fortunately no harm's done," I said. "What did Honest John Driver say? Bottiger told my sister so much that she may just as well hear what else is happening."

"He congratulated me on my despatch; he nearly burst with joy, and he couldn't find words enough to thank me," said Chelubai.

"That looks good—as though he'd subscribe all right," I said.

"You don't know the alphabet of finance, if you think that," said Chelubai. "I don't like his gratitude at all. I should be far more hopeful of his paying up if he'd run down our work. However, I reminded him of the subscription, and he said it would be all right."

"What will he make out of the removal of Pudleigh?" said Bottiger.

"I don't know. He might make anything between fifteen and thirty thousand pounds," said Chelubai.

"Then surely he won't stick at a couple of thousand," said Bottiger.

"A business man of Honest John Driver's ability would stick at a couple of shillings, if he thought he couldn't be made to pay it."

"Well, then," I said, "we ought to make our plan on the supposition that he won't pay for our

services, and be ready to act the moment he refuses."

"That's talking," said Chelubai with approval. "But how are we to get at him?"

"I think we shall have to kidnap him, and frighten it out of him."

"How?" said Chelubai.

"The kidnapping will be difficult; but we ought to be able to work it. Once kidnapped, we will follow some approved mediæval course of treatment —pull out a tooth every four hours, for example. Let us bear in mind that Honest John Driver is also an enemy of Humanity. We need not take any nonsense from him," said I.

"We need not," said Chelubai heartily.

There was a pause, as with one consent we gave our minds to the matter of kidnapping our probably recalcitrant debtor. Then Chelubai said: "Please excuse our boring you with these business details, Miss Brand."

"After the dulness of the German school from which my sister has firmly levanted, these business details must be positively exhilarating," said I. I did not like ladling out romance to Chelubai and Bottiger. But really, in the circumstances, I did not see what else I could do.

"Well, I'm driving Bottiger down to St. Albans," said Chelubai, rising. "Will Miss Brand and you lunch with me at the Savoy at two?"

"We shall be very pleased," I said.

They took their leave and went.

"Well," I said to Angel when they had gone, "you're in the thick of it now. Already you're an accomplice after the fact in the removal of Pudleigh."

"I don't care," she said.

"I tell you what, you'd better join us outright, and take shares in the Company," I said, smiling.

"I will, if it's a matter of getting rid of wretches like Pudleigh," she said firmly.

I had spoken in jest, but she was in earnest.

"Of course we are only going to remove objectionable people, the wretches who despoil the widow and orphan, and grind down the poor," I said.

And then I saw that if she joined the Company she might be exceedingly useful to us; that at any rate her association with it would invest philanthropy with a new charm. I began to weigh carefully the reasons for and against her joining, and had made up my mind that we could easily keep her out of danger, when she interrupted me by saying:

"Whatever am I to do for clothes? That horrible landlady has taken my things to pay the rent for my room. I have nothing but what I have on."

"We'll soon have those clothes," I said. "Landladies can't play a game like that. Will

you amuse yourself with a book while I go and arrange about them?"

She cast an eager eye on my book-shelves, and said, "I should like to."

I went round to the chambers in which I practise, and which I share with Harris, a barrister of the same standing as myself, and I instructed Wicks, our clerk, a youth of an astonishing *savoir faire,* to take a cab to the Harleyford Road, tell the landlady to send in a bill for her rent to Morton and bring back the trunks. I gave him leave to bully the landlady into hysterics, for I could not see that she deserved any consideration after her inhumanity to Angel, and I was sure that Wicks would see to it that she repented from the bottom of her heart. I saw him depart on his mission, simmering with joyful anticipation.

Then I went into Fleet Street to buy the evening papers, and the first thing that caught my eye on the placards was,

TRAGEDY IN SOUTH LONDON.

I bought the sheet and two others of the same kidney, and came down Mitre Court into the Temple. I am afraid that my hand shook and my mouth was rather dry as I unfolded the newspaper —a thousand possibilities sprang into my mind. Chelubai, or I, might have dropped something near

the scene of the removal; I remembered that we had actually thrown down the stumps of our cheroots in the lane off Stoneleigh Street—and resolved as soon as I returned to burn the box which had held them. My eye caught the column which described the South London tragedy, and ran down it swiftly. When I finished it I stared blankly round the King's Bench Walk; it told how a Clapham bricklayer had slain his lodger with a coal-hammer.

I turned again to the paper and looked through it quickly, and then again slowly. There was not a word of the operation of the Company; Albert Amsted Pudleigh might still be strutting along Oxford Street for anything that the editor had learned to the contrary. I could not understand what had happened. Had his body been spirited away, or were the police biding their time and moving quietly before announcing their discovery of it? I looked through the other papers I had bought; the Clapham bricklayer held the place of honor in each; of Albert Amsted Pudleigh there was no word.

I climbed my stairs very slowly, pondering the matter, and exceedingly disquieted. Angel was buried in "Many Inventions," and set it down with a little sigh when I came in. I told her that I had sent for her trunks, and she told me of her Vauxhall landlady. One landlady led to another,

and as she told me of those she had experienced, I learned a good deal of her three months in London: how she had moved from an hotel to dear lodgings, from dear lodgings to cheap, from cheap to cheaper, all the while pawning her trinkets and then her mother's jewelry, until she had come to the end of everything in the Harleyford Road. She had, of course, been swindled everywhere. I gathered, too, that she had suffered bitterly from the strangeness of the life after her country upbringing, and from her loneliness, how she had been oppressed by a growing terror, and at last by utter despair. She did not, of course, make an appeal to my pity by telling me these things in so many words; but now her tone, now her look and now a phrase told me clearly enough the story of an agony. I felt that there were few, and likely to be few, actions in my life which I should remember with greater pleasure than helping knock Albert Amsted Pudleigh on the head.

I think I showed her plainly my sympathy and indignation. But she cut me short in the expression of my strong desire to wring her Vauxhall landlady's neck by saying: "But how did you know that I was Angel Pavis?"

"I am a barrister as well as a philanthropist. And I gave an opinion on your case against Pudleigh in the matter of the Quorley Granite Company."

"To think of it!" cried Angel. "I pictured you an old man in a wig—oh, ever so old!"

I explained to her that nowadays there is a growing disbelief in the monopoly of wisdom by the senile.

Presently I went round to my other chambers, and had waited less than a quarter of an hour, when Wicks drove up in triumph with two trunks on the top of a four-wheeler. I observed that he was still in a quiet simmer of joy, now of fell joy, and understood that there was, if not wailing, at any rate gnashing of teeth in Vauxhall.

I thanked him, told the cabman to drive into King's Bench Walk and got into the cab. As soon as the trunks were in the room, Angel went off joyfully to put on another gown, and at the end of half an hour appeared looking fresher and prettier than ever. Already in the reaction from her oppressed and terror-stricken condition during the past month, thanks to the restoring power of joyous youth, the traces of her privations and anxieties had almost faded from her face.

We decided that since it was a joy to her to drive in a hansom, economy compelled us to take one to the Savoy. We found Chelubai and Bottiger already seated at a table well placed for seeing people. Chelubai tossed a halfpenny paper to the floor as he rose to greet us, and when we

had taken our seats, he said: "What has happened to the British Press?"

"That's what I have been asking for the last two hours," I said.

"Evidently the police are keeping the matter dark. But why?" said Chelubai.

"I can only suppose that unless a reporter chances to get hold of a matter of this kind they do keep such incidents dark—at any rate till they see their way to acting with credit," I said. "It certainly reflects no credit on them that a rising King of Finance should be knocked on the head under the palings of that most important British institution, the Oval cricket-ground."

"Perhaps they see their way to acting with more effect if they wait a day or two," said Bottiger gloomily.

"I don't see where the effect is coming in. We haven't given it a chance," I said cheerfully.

"Something may have gone wrong," said Bottiger.

"How do you mean?" said Chelubai.

"Are you sure he was quite—removed?"

"Unless the head of a rising King of Finance is as thick as his skin and we ought to have used a half-brick instead of sand, he was quite removed," I said.

"It was the best sand—silver sand," said Chelubai.

"Well, it beats me," said Bottiger, more gloomily than ever.

I took advantage of the interruption afforded by the coming of the *hors d'œuvres* to shift the conversation to lighter themes, and we had a very pleasant lunch. I saw that Angel enjoyed it; her appetite was good, naturally enough, and she laughed many times.

When the coffee came and we had lighted our cigars, it seemed to me that the time for philanthropic discussions had come, and I said abruptly: "My sister wants to join the Company. She has run away from school, she won't go back and she's as keen on philanthropy as I am."

"It's not woman's work!" cried Bottiger hotly.

"Surely women have been great philanthropists," said I. "Why, we agreed that domestic removal was their proper line; that they shone in it. And we never know into what branches the operations of the Company may extend; we should be prepared for all kinds of work."

"I didn't mean that at all!" said Bottiger, again hotly.

"I'm entirely opposed to the practice of a woman's working," said Chelubai.

"You carry your Englishness too far. This is mere prejudice. But really this is not a question which we can properly discuss; the correspondents of one of the daily papers settled it one way or

the other, I don't know which, last silly season," said I.

"Surely you're not in earnest, Miss Brand," said Bottiger, appealing to Angel.

"Yes, I am," said Angel firmly. "You see, I've suffered from objectionable people myself, or I shouldn't be here."

"But do you think the kind of annoyances you have had to suffer from are bad enough to justify your helping to remove people?" said Chelubai, thinking doubtless that she spoke of the annoyances which had caused her to run away from her imaginary school.

"Yes, quite," said Angel.

"They are," said I, breaking in. "But this is all beside the question. Philanthropy should be disinterested. We ourselves were actuated solely by our duty to human progress in our recent philanthropic enterprise; and as soon as my sister recovers from her recent experience of objectionable people she will become a disinterested philanthropist, too. We have no right to check the altruistic expansion of her spirit."

"That's very true," said Chelubai gravely, "if Miss Brand feels like that."

"At present I feel as if I were at war with all the world except—except—Roger." She hesitated and flushed a little over my name; and I thought it sounded very nice on her tongue. "But I ex-

pect the other — the disinterestedness — would come," she added.

"I do so hold by purity of motive," said Chelubai sadly.

"You wait till I have shown my sister the Children's Hospital," I said quickly. "That will fill her with a disinterested zeal for Humanity that will burn stronger and longer than your own."

"Do you think so?" said Chelubai, and his rough-hewn, Red-Indian face brightened.

"I'm sure of it," I said with conviction.

"But—but I'm not sure that I could knock people on the head," said Angel, in a rather depressed tone.

"Oh, you'd soon get into it; it's merely a knack," I said cheeringly. "And there's another side to the matter: have we any right to reject my sister's useful help? In philanthropy, as in other expressions of human energy, beauty has its uses. For example, if it were necessary ever to prove an *alibi,* her evidence would have great weight with a jury."

"If you were in danger, Roger, I would swear anything to get you out of it!" cried Angel, with girlish earnestness.

"I'm sure you would," I said gratefully. "But we must strive that our perjury, if ever we are forced to commit it, shall, like our removals, be

actuated only by a passionate devotion to the cause of human progress.''

'' Well, I would try to do it from that, too,'' said Angel.

'' Well, then, since I'm willing to pledge myself that my sister will soon be moved by the same philanthropic motives that we are, I propose that she be allowed to join the Company on the same terms as ourselves, and that we co-opt her as a fourth director,'' said I.

'' If you really insist, Miss Brand, I withdraw my objection and agree,'' said Chelubai with some mournfulness.

'' Yes, I want to join the Company,'' said Angel firmly.

'' And you, Bottiger? '' said I.

'' If you think it's all right, I suppose I agree too,'' said Bottiger, in his usual grudging way.

'' The motion is carried,'' said I.

We drank the new director's health.

CHAPTER VI

THE COMPANY TAKES PROCEEDINGS TO COLLECT A DEBT

For the next fortnight the Company did nothing. We watched Amalgamated Fertilizers sink and sink, as Honest John Driver and Gutermann unloaded their shares, and Chelubai and Bottiger made a few hundreds by selling for the account. I levied toll on those hundreds for the Children's Hospital. Doubtless Honest John Driver got four days' start of Gutermann in the operation, for it was not till the fifth morning that we saw in the papers paragraphs headed "Mysterious Disappearance of a Financier," and read that that respected citizen and imperialist of East Surbiton, Mr. Albert Amsted Pudleigh, had left his office at five on the previous Friday and vanished into the *ewigkeit* or some such spacious lair. This brief account was followed in every paper by a description of the rascal so flattering that his mother, in her most partial mood, could by no chance have recognized him. Since he had but reached the rank of two hundred thousand pounds, the papers only accorded him paragraphs for a day or two, and paid no further heed to his vanishing. For

my part, I had grown tired of the subject of Pudleigh long before the appearance of the first paragraph; Chelubai and Bottiger were always for discussing the silence of the police, what they were probably doing, or not doing, in the matter, with an utterly morbid interest. The subject bored me, and I let them see it. My interest lay wholly in the question whether Honest John Driver would pay his subscription or not. I hoped, but I did not for the moment expect, that he would.

I found it a very pleasant fortnight, for the fact that I had some one to look after made an amazing difference to my life. Angel, too, I was sure, found it no less pleasant, for the fact that she had, for the first time, some one to look after her made as great a difference to her life. We were hard up, indeed, for a curious sentimental desire to support the child myself kept me firm in my usual course of never borrowing from Chelubai and Bottiger, save in Bridge emergencies.

At the end of the fortnight the quarterly instalment of my income and checks from solicitors and for reviewing were due, so that I should be in easy circumstances. During that fortnight Angel and I had many interesting and earnest discussions as to ways and means, whether we ought to pay ninepence or tenpence halfpenny a pound for bacon, and so forth. She even proposed that I should save six shillings a week by discharging

Mrs. Plimsoll, and letting her do that good woman's work. But I would not hear of it. "No," I said with generous warmth, "it shall never be said that I let a sister of mine discharge the offices of a menial!"

We led, perforce, a very quiet life. I abandoned my patient and persistent attendance at the more exciting cases which were exercising the intelligence of his Majesty's Judges, the newspapers, and the British Public, and wrote hard and steadily all the morning, while Angel read with no less steadiness the lighter books in my library or the novels I gathered for review. I soon found that I could trust her judgment in the matter of novels, and she saved me the reading of many; I wrote my reviews from her accounts of them, and she was indeed delighted at contributing a share of the work. At half-past one we made a frugal lunch off cheese, bread and butter and marmalade, and between two and three I did another hour's work.

At three I opened my oak, and Chelubai or Bottiger, or both of them, never failed to come in to tea. With the coming of Angel both of them had developed an imperative craving for my daily companionship, and, naturally, politeness compelled them to do their best to entertain and amuse her. They were of real help in the matter of food; they brought cakes of a wonderful rich-

ness and boxes of chocolates for tea, and they vied strenuously with one another in the matter of dining us. It was unfortunate that I could not see my way to accepting the hospitality of one or the other every night. On the nights on which I did not accept it, we all four dined together at places little affected by ladies—the Cock, Stone's and the Cheshire Cheese—for even the wealthy Chelubai, used as he was to the best efforts of the Savoy, the Carlton and the Ritz, did not disdain the honest but unpretentious English food of those hostelries. Bottiger preferred it.

Talking and smoking, we lingered at our table till ten o'clock, and then I brought Angel home, to the pleasantest hour of the day. Sitting on either side of the fire, we talked; and whether she talked of her old life in Cumberland, or of the people in a novel she had read, or listened—and she was an excellent listener—to the wicked wisdom of the world from my experienced lips, that hour never bored me. I began even to resent spending the evening at the theatre when one of the Reviews for which I wrote had sent me tickets that I might write about the play. But her childlike joy in the frequently tedious performances was so great that I had not the heart to deny her the pleasure. And after all, when we came home and ate the well-chosen cakes of Chelubai and Bottiger, we had most of an hour's

talk, in which I generally had to expose the pernicious or idiotic view of life presented by the dramatist.

As far as I could find out, Angel had but one conspicuous weakness, a pitiable fondness for the game of golf—lawn-tennis is my game. I made shift to bear with it, in the interests of her health, and on two or three afternoons I sent her down to Wimbledon with Bottiger, whose morbid craving for the game was far greater than her own. He assured me that she played very well indeed. "In another year," he said, with a hushed solemnity, "she will make any woman in England go."

It was curious that at the end of ten days both Angel and I had fallen into a habit of talking about the future as if she had taken the place of my sister and sharer of my rooms for good and all. I did not expect the good fortune to last, though Angel's lack of friends seemed to prevent the possibility of interference, but I was bent on making the most of it, and, as I have said, the charming presence of a delightful creature made life a far more important matter.

The police did not trouble us, or at any rate troubled us very little. Chelubai did not suffer from the acute form of remorse, the fear of detection; Angel and the need of working hard to keep the home over our heads gave me very little

time for unpleasant thoughts. Bottiger, who was quite safe from the police, was far more uneasy than either of us. His imagination was forever conjuring up disastrous possibilities, and we had to be very severe indeed with him to prevent him from plaguing us with his visions.

We were, in truth, far more concerned with the question how to gather in the subscription from Honest John Driver, and held many councils in which we worked out a scheme for inducing him to act up to his nickname. We had made up our minds to strike directly he refused to pay; and when we learned that he, too, was a Whole-Hog Wapshot our hopes of quick payment sank low. A good hocussing drug played an important part in our plan, and Bottiger procured the formula of one from the able but drunken doctor of his acquaintance, and we had the prescription made up. It had but one defect—it was somewhat bitter. We tested it carefully, therefore, with different liquors, and found that its bitterness attracted less the attention of the drinker when it was mixed with black coffee. But lest the coffee should impair its force, we tried it on Bottiger. It sent him into a quite satisfactory, stertorous slumber.

When our preparations had been made, the weather turned very wet, and on a happy thought of mine we set about teaching Angel 'Bridge.' She

proved an admirable pupil, of great quickness and intelligence, and after our practical teaching, watching us play, and reading a treatise on the game while I worked in the morning, she made a fair partner for me against Chelubai and Bottiger. On the fourth afternoon we won enough off them, to her great delight, to pay for our dinners.

At last the day of payment came, and in the morning Chelubai called on Honest John Driver. The worthy King of Finance made no difficulty about seeing him, and welcomed him with a bluff but gracious *bonhomie*. But when Chelubai asked for the two thousand pounds, he made very clear his firm resolve not to pay it.

"No, Mr. Kearsage," he said, with a generous warmth of conviction almost enthusiastic. "It is a matter of principle with me. I make it my practice never to pay money except under a written contract. Show me the contract and I pay you the money. No man in the city of London can say that I don't."

Chelubai was quite sure that many men in the city of London could say that he didn't, but he kept his assurance to himself, since there was nothing to be gained by ruffling the pride of the King of Finance.

"Mr. Driver, sir," he said in his strongest American accent, "as a man of business myself,

I respect your devotion to principle. But if you will dine with me to-night at the Hotel Cecil, I think I shall be able to show you good reasons why you should pay me the money, and prove to you that as we have been useful to you in the past we can be useful to you again. I am dining with two young friends, a man and a lady. They will go early, and after they have gone we can have a good business talk."

Honest John Driver hesitated, reflected doubtless that he could without an effort talk the hind leg off a horse, that he enjoyed above everything talking the hind legs off horses, that the dinner committed him to nothing and would cost him nothing. "Well, Mr. Kearsage," he said, with a pompous gravity, "I never refuse to listen to a business proposition. I will dine with you, and hear what you have to say."

Chelubai came straight from the city to my rooms, where the Company was gathered together, and gave us a full account of his interview with Honest John Driver. He ended by saying: "And so the fly is going to walk into the parlor," and it seemed to us a happy description of what the King of Finance was doing. All our preparations were made, the hocussing dose even had been measured out—a generous dose in a very small phial. There was nothing to do but play Bridge until the hour of action came; and we played,

lunched, played, had tea, and played. At half-past six Chelubai and Bottiger went away to dress, and at a quarter to eight they called for us in Chelubai's motor-car—a comfortable 16 h.-p. Napier. We left the car in the quadrangle near to the door of the restaurant, our motor-coats and caps and Angel's wraps in the car, and Angel and I waited in the ante-chamber of the restaurant while the others chose the tables; for Bottiger was not dining with us, but at the next table.

Angel was flushed with delighted excitement, for to her had been assigned the most difficult part of the business, and the flush and the brightness of her excited eyes invested her face with a startling brilliance. I bade her try and be cool, and she said that when the time came she would be cool, with a confidence which freed me from all fear of her bungling.

Chelubai soon came back, and he had scarcely rejoined us when Honest John Driver entered. Chelubai shook hands with him, and said:

"Let me introduce you, Mr. Driver, Miss Armitage—Mr. Armitage, Mr. Driver."

We had seen no reason to entrust him with our real names.

The King of Finance shook us warmly by the hand in turn, and in turn said, "Very pleased to meet you."

Chelubai led us into the restaurant to a table

near the door. Bottiger sat at the next table. Chelubai took the head of the table, with Honest John Driver on his right hand, where Angel should have sat but for the necessity that she should be on the drinking hand of the King of Finance, next his wine glasses. I faced her and Driver.

I observed that the thoughtfulness with which Chelubai and I suggested, discussed, accepted or rejected the dishes of every course made a very good impression on the King of Finance, and inspired him with a useful respect for us, so that the opinions on the weather, which he at once put forth, were really respectful in tone. For a while I kept an eye on Angel, and saw that at first she was too excited to enjoy her dinner. But by the time we had finished our fish she had plainly settled down. Honest John Driver seemed for a while somewhat out of his element, and therefore subdued; then, finding that his essays in talk were well received, he cheered up, and led the conversation with all the sprightliness of a commercial traveller. He was infinitely waggish; he made jokes which would not have come amiss from a fourth-form boy, and laughed at them with the heartiest laughter. Between jokes he lavished on Angel unmistakable, if disconcerting, compliments, resolved, as I perceived, to prove himself not only the wag, but "quite the lady's man."

And all the while the brazen honesty blazed ostentatiously from his flat, round face. I have never seen such honesty, or so much of it; it seemed at times positively indecent to make such a parade of a moral quality, harmless though it was. I felt that he ought to have worn a beard, and hidden some of it.

So we came, or rather Honest John Driver brought us, through dinner. I was saved from boredom by the thought that his waggishness was all in the day's work and far more bearable than the half-crown Franco-Italian dinner of Albert Amsted Pudleigh. Chelubai, inured to business men by his early training, never flinched. Angel, poor child, looked often bewildered and oftener disgusted; then with an effort she would recover herself and appear amiable and serene.

When we had finished dinner, and chosen each our *liqueur,* Chelubai turned to Driver and said: "I've ordered Java coffee, but perhaps it is too bitter for you, and you would prefer the ordinary?"

"No, no," said Driver. "I follow your lead. I know when I'm being done well by an expert."

Chelubai ordered coffee, and began a story of a San Franciscan operation in real estate to which the King of Finance listened with all his ears. Angel put both elbows on the table. In the middle of the story the coffee, *liqueurs* and cigars

came. Driver set down his cup on his right hand in a most convenient position, took his *liqueur* and chose a cigar with scarcely a glance at it, so absorbed was he in the story. Chelubai came to the end of it.

"Rascally thieves!" cried Honest John Driver, with honest indignation.

Chelubai upset his glass of brandy. Driver's mouth opened, he grabbed at his napkin and dabbed at the spilt spirit. Angel's right wrist came deftly down into the hollow of her left arm, her hand hung for three seconds above Driver's cup and rose again.

"Bang went half-a-crown!" cried Honest John Driver, and laughed heartily. Chelubai and I laughed with him, and I heard Angel gasp.

"Bang it went!" cried Chelubai, helping himself to another glass of brandy, and plunging into another business yarn.

Driver drank his coffee like a man. He made something of a wry face over it indeed, but he would by no means appear not to know a good thing when he got it. We were all keen attention watching for the first symptoms, which, thanks to Bottiger, we knew well, of the working of the drug. Chelubai began to reel off yet another business yarn, a long one, and he was but half-way through it when we saw that Driver could not keep his mind on it. He passed his hand over his

eyes, then pulled himself together, and interrupted Chelubai by saying thickly: "A toast and a sentiment. Miss Armitage, and may the festive board never be ungraced by the presence of beauty."

He bowed and leered at Angel. Chelubai said sharply, "The bill!" and the waiter, who had it ready, presented it. Chelubai put six sovereigns on the plate, rose and said, "Let's go and smoke in front of the hotel. The night's quite warm enough."

We all rose, Chelubai put his arm through Driver's, Angel led the way, Bottiger and I followed close behind our prize. As we came out of the restaurant Driver was already staggering, and I took his other arm and said cheerfully: "Hold up, old man!"

Angel and Bottiger jumped into the front seat of the motor-car, Driver made some fatuous and hardly coherent objection to going for a drive at that time of night; but we dragged him into the tonneau and plumped him down between us. Bottiger started the car, and we went gently out of the quadrangle.

A few yards down the Strand Driver seemed to pull himself together once more, sat bolt upright and said, "Thish ish shplendid."

I took hold of his right arm, Chelubai of his left, and we held him still.

"Bustle her along, and keep the horn going!"

I said sharply, for I thought it possible we might have a struggle.

In Wellington Street, Driver, who had been gurgling, chuckling and nodding, suddenly began to sing a Wapshot hymn. It ran:

"The souls in torment wish that they
Had Whole-Hog Wapshots been;
Then would they not have wailing gazed
Upon that dreadful scene."

He sang two verses with spirit and half a third, but that was incoherent. Then he fell back limp and snoring.

We ran up Southampton Row into Seymour Street, and so to Camden Town, then through St. John's Wood into Maida Vale, and turned up to Kilburn. In Maida Vale we stopped, put on our motor-coats, and I saw to it that Angel was warmly wrapped up. Then I said to Chelubai: "I'm horribly cramped. Let's shove the subscriber under our feet."

We did, and he snored away peacefully.

Seeing that the night was dark, and we had our valuable lump of Finance and a lady on board, Bottiger was content to go at a moderate speed, so that it was a quarter to eleven when we reached his cottage in Hertfordshire, which we use for week-ends in summer and partridge-shooting in their season.

First of all, we carried Honest John Driver to the sofa of the dining-room and bound him hand and foot. We unloaded the car of the food and luggage we had brought, lighted fires and brought four demijohns which contained, or had contained, spirits out of the larder, and ranged them in a row before the sofa. Chelubai poured some kerosene out of an oil-can on to a rag, and anointed generously the chin and nostrils of our sleeping captive. Then we set out brandy, soda and cards, and sat down to play Bridge.

CHAPTER VII

THE G. P. R. C. COLLECTS A DEBT

Angel and I played Chelubai and Bottiger a match of five rubbers. To the accompaniment of Driver's loud snoring we had played two rubbers, of which either side had won one, and were in the middle of the third, when he awoke with the resounding snort of the rhinoceros.

Chelubai, who had just dealt, laid down his hand and said, "Do you feel fit to talk business, Mr. Driver?"

The King of Finance only groaned, and his eyes wandered in an utterly vacant glance round the room, and then rested on each of us in turn in a plainly vain effort to recognize us.

"Your declaration, partner," said Chelubai, and we went on playing.

Driver groaned several times, and at last said in a whining voice, very unbecoming to a man of his fine bulk, "My head is splitting and the ropes are cutting my wrists."

"It will teach you to act up to your nickname," said Chelubai coldly.

"Oh, but if he is being hurt you must stop it!" said Angel.

We laid down our cards; I loosened the ropes round his wrists a little and propped him up on the sofa; Chelubai mixed him an effervescing draught which Bottiger had found cleared the head of the drug very quickly and poured it down his throat. Then, leaving him sitting up, we went back to our game. Angel and I won the third rubber. During the next I watched Honest John Driver at intervals, and saw that his eye grew brighter and his face fuller and fuller of discomfort. The fourth rubber was a hard-fought fight, but in the end Angel and I won it.

I pushed away my chair from the table, faced him and said sternly: "Now, Mr. Driver, first of all you had better realize what dishonesty has done for you. It has delivered you bound hand and foot into the hands of the very people you have defrauded of the money you promised them for removing your financial accomplice, Albert Pudleigh—people who, as you have the best reason in the world to know, stick at nothing."

Driver's flabby face faded to an unpleasant cream color, which was as near white as it could get.

"B—b—b—but you're wrong!" he stammered. "I n—n—never had any intention of defrauding you! N—none at all."

"It's not a question of your intentions, but of our intentions," I said grimly. "Do you smell kerosene?"

"Y—y—yes," said Driver.

"And do you see those demijohns?"

"Yes."

"Well, we're going to tie you to the sofa, pour kerosene over you till you and the sofa and the floor are soaking with it and burn you and the house altogether. It's insured."

"You never would!" cried Honest John Driver, and his voice rose to a screech.

We all laughed together the fiendish laugh of a villain of melodrama.

"Wouldn't we?" I said, and the others rose.

I took from the corner a coil of stout rope, and said: "You will be dead before this rope is burnt through. A painful death, but quick."

Bottiger and Chelubai laid him flat on the sofa.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Stop, stop!" he screamed. "I will pay up! I always meant to pay up!"

"Yes, yes," I said impatiently; "we know all about stumers." And I uncoiled the rope.

"No, no; I'll give you an open check, and stay here till it's cashed," he yelled, and all his face glistened with sweat.

"He seems to me to be talking," said Chelubai, and we paused and looked at one another.

"But by the time we have cashed the check he will have had the money for twenty-four hours," I said.

"Well, he must pay interest," said Chelubai. "That will make the check £3,000."

"Three thousand pounds!" cried Honest John Driver. "Why, that's over eighteen thousand per cent. per annum!"

"So it is," said Chelubai carelessly. "I guess you'll ask what the rate is before you borrow our money another time."

"And we've had all the trouble of kidnapping him and bringing him down here," growled Bottiger.

"Oh, our fee for kidnapping him is a thousand pounds, of course," I said. "We couldn't charge you less, Mr. Driver, a man of your standing in the city."

Honest John Driver groaned.

"And his board and lodging," said Angel, whose mind ran, with reason, on housekeeping.

"Yes," said Chelubai; "I like an odd sum in an open check, it looks better."

"Well, a hundred and fifteen pounds eight and sixpence is a nice odd sum," I said. "That will make the check £4,115 8s. 6d., Mr. Driver."

The King of Finance groaned piteously, as if his very vitals were racked with pain. "You've

bested me, and I must pay,'' he said, in a voice full of tears.

His emotion did not touch us. We untied his hands, set him in a chair before the table and put blotting-paper, pens and ink before him. Chelubai took a note-case from his pocket, drew from it a folded sheet of paper and laid it on the blotting-paper. '' First of all,'' he said, '' we want a letter from you explaining things.''

'' Why, it's my office paper! '' cried the King of Finance.

'' Yes, I thought you might want it, so I brought it away with me when I called on you,'' said Chelubai. '' Write away. Date it yesterday.''

Honest John Driver dated the letter, and wrote, with many protests, at Chelubai's dictation:

'' *My dear Sir Ralph Bottiger:*

'' I shall have much pleasure in dining with you at the Cecil, and motoring down to your Hertfordshire cottage for a night at Bridge. But let us play good high points, for, thanks to the timely disappearance of my fellow-director, Mr. Pudleigh, I have made twice as much out of the silly British Public over Amalgamated Fertilizers as I expected, and I should like a good gamble.

'' Yours sincerely,

'' John Driver.''

"A cynical letter," said Chelubai sadly, as he put it in his note-case. "It would do you a lot of harm if ever it became public property."

"There will be no need—no need," said the King of Finance.

"I hope not," said Chelubai. "Now for the check."

Honest John Driver pulled himself together and looked round. The honesty, which had not been conspicuous for some time in his face, shone out in all its old brazen ostentation, and he said: "I'm afraid I haven't got my check-book with me. I'll send you a check as soon as I get back to town."

"What!" I shouted. "No check! Burn him! Burn him!"

"Burn him! Burn him!" yelled Chelubai.

"Burn him!" cried Angel.

"Burn him!" roared Bottiger, and catching him by the scruff of the neck, he shook him vigorously.

"Wait! Wait!" screeched the King of Finance. "I may have a blank check on me! I sometimes carry one," and with fumbling fingers he groped furiously in his waistcoat pocket and brought out a folded check.

"What an escape you've had!" said Angel.

"The King of Finance opened the check with such shaking fingers that we gave him a brandy and soda before we let him fill it up. Our right-

eous indignation seemed to have unnerved him.

"Don't leave out your private mark or change your signature. We can burn you just as easily to-morrow, and we will," said I coldly.

The King of Finance shook his head. "Honest John Driver doesn't play dirty tricks like that," he said firmly.

"He'd much better not," said I.

He made the check payable to Bottiger, and Bottiger put it in his pocket. The King of Finance kept his eyes glued to it till it vanished from sight, then he sighed heavily.

And now, having finished our day's work, we thought of bed. There were two double-bedded rooms in the cottage, and the linen had been aired against our coming by a neighboring cottager. Angel bade us good-night, and went off to one room; Chelubai and Bottiger, having tossed with me for the order in which we should keep our turns of watch over Driver, went off to the other. Driver's legs were still bound; I helped him on to the sofa and threw a rug over him. He composed himself to rest; but for a while he sighed and sighed, still teeming with emotion, apparently at having had to disgorge a percentage of his plunder of the British Public. Then he snored. I amused myself with a pipe and a novel for a couple of hours; then I awoke Chelubai, and, leaving him on guard, went to bed.

Angel and Bottiger cooked the breakfast, since in the circumstances we could not bring in outside help; and we all came to it very cheerful. All of us, that is, except our guest. We four had a change of clothes with us, but he was still in evening dress, and that rumpled. Moreover, we had had our cold tubs, but he had not washed to an extent appreciable by the naked eye. Indeed, he assured me that he hated cold water; and the frankness of his admission, though hardly the admission itself, raised him in my esteem. After all, he seemed to have some shadow of a claim to his title of Honest.

After breakfast Bottiger set off to walk to the station, and while Angel read a novel, Chelubai and I cleaned our guns.

Honest John Driver watched us a while in silence, and I observed that a settled melancholy brooded over his flabby face like a mist over a marsh. Presently he said: "Now that young friend of yours, is he really a baronet?"

"Of course he is," said Chelubai. "The Bottigers have been baronets since the reign of Charles I."

"Well," said Honest John Driver, "it's something to have been robbed by a baronet—if one must be robbed."

"Robbed by a baronet! Failed to rob a baronet, you mean!" I said indignantly.

"Yes, yes; no offence!" said Driver hastily. And then slower: "Do you think he'd dine with me at the Savoy? I might be able to put some business in your way. If I could see my way to always having people like poor Pudleigh removed I could work with a freer hand."

"There's no doubt you could," said Chelubai.

"Well, do you think your friend the baronet would dine with me?"

"I dare say he would," I said indifferently, "if you promised not to make so many jokes."

"Ah, I am a bit too much of a wag—sometimes," he said thoughtfully.

His talk set me considering, and I could not but conclude that Gregson had misinformed me. Honest John Driver could not really be a King of Finance; he must be a mere princelet of that realm, or he would not hanker so greedily for the society of a baronet—he would have reached the stage of craving for dukes. It was a little disappointing; he might as yet have stolen no more than half a million from the intelligent investor, and we had been treating him as a veritable King of Finance. I could only console myself by the thought that he was the more likely to often need our help.

When we were ready we put on him a Norfolk jacket and cap, and started out to walk up partridges, pointing out to him that if he tried to

run away we would assuredly shoot him by accident. He did not enjoy the sport; he was afraid of the guns, and jumped lightly every time we fired. His patent leather boots were tight and ill-suited to the rough going, nor were his black trousers in keeping with his amusement. He looked, indeed, a curious hybrid, a sportsman from his crown to the bottom of his jacket, and a man of the world about the legs. Moreover, his wind was not good, and we were without compassion; we drove him along, and brought him home foot-sore and weary. Angel, on the other hand, enjoyed herself exceedingly; she made nothing of the rough going, and came back as fresh, or rather fresher, than she started.

We were eager for lunch, and a very little while getting it ready. In the middle of it Bottiger's wire came. It ran:

"Dine with me at the Cecil, Bottiger."

It was the formula which announced his success.

Half an hour later we had packed and were in the motor car. Honest John Driver was but a pale rider, and clung tightly to the side whenever Chelubai let her rip. When she was going up the long hill beyond Watford I took the quiet opportunity to say to Honest John Driver: "Now, Mr. Driver, I have no doubt you have been thinking

of giving the police a quiet hint to keep watch on us, and catch us in our next operation."

"I haven't! I never thought of it!" said Honest John Driver, with a quickness which assured me that he had.

"Well, I want to warn you that the moment we find ourselves being watched, and we are sure to find it out, we shall instantly take steps to knock you on the head. I needn't point out how likely we are to succeed. We've shown you what we can do."

"I shouldn't dream of it! I shouldn't dream of it!" cried Driver. "I know what an escape I've had! Besides, I bear no malice in business —never. If a man bests me, he bests me. Why, I may be working with him again in a month—as I hope to be with you, as I hope to be with you."

"Our terms will be cash in advance for the future," I said coldly.

"It's a system I object to—strongly—on principle. But—but—yes; in your case I'd make an exception."

"You'd have to," said I.

"There's really no need for you to be afraid of me. There isn't, really," he said earnestly. "After all, I've only paid you twenty-five per cent. for the extra profit I made by getting poor Pudleigh out of the way."

"We'd have made it more, if we'd known," said I.

"I'd have made it less, if I'd known—you. I'd have paid up the £2,000," he said, with a groan.

Chelubai stopped our talk by again letting the car rip, which made Honest John Driver very busy holding on, till we came to Kilburn Hill. Half-way up it he had recovered himself enough to say, "How did you remove poor Pudleigh?"

"That's a trade secret," I said stiffly.

"I hope it wasn't a very painful death," he said, with a sigh.

"Death! Who said we killed him?" I said sharply. "Our agreement was that he should disappear for a fortnight."

Honest John Driver's face fell. "This is disappointing," he sighed. "He'll make a great fuss when he comes back."

"He won't make sixteen thousand pounds' worth of fuss," I said shortly, for he seemed to me to be lacking in common gratitude.

"That's true," he said more cheerfully. "And after all he can't do anything—anything at all."

"I expect he can't," I said.

For the rest of the way he was busy turning pale and holding on, and when at last we drew up before his offices his sigh of relief was almost a groan.

He shook hands warmly with each of us, and said, "Very pleased to have met you."

Then he removed his tall flabby bulk stiffly from

the car, and said, " What's your friend the baronet's address? "

I gave him Bottiger's club, and he said good-afternoon and turned to go in. As he turned, there came bouncing down the steps, his coat-tails dancing, his hat tottering, his copper-colored face distorted with fury, his pig's eyes blazing, the late Albert Amsted Pudleigh.

In a breath he had gripped Honest John Driver's collar, and, hanging on to it, shrieked: " You rascal! You scoundrel! Where's my money? Where's my share of Amalgamated Fertilizers? You thought I'd gone for good. But I haven't. I've just come out of hospital, and got my memory back, to find that you've unloaded without waiting for me. But I'm going to have my money! I'm going to have it! "

Honest John Driver shook himself free, his face once more brazenly honest. " I don't know what you're talking about," he said, with splendid dignity. " I'm Honest John Driver, and this is no way to talk to me. What's the good of making a scene, man? Come inside and I'll talk to you there." And he caught Pudleigh's arm and bundled him up the steps with an activity which surprised me.

Chelubai started the car, and drove her gently along on third speed; he seemed unusually careful of the traffic.

Presently he turned to me a very sad face, and said in a very sad voice: "This is very disappointing—very. And I used the best sand—silver sand, too. What a skull! What a skull!"

I could find no words to comfort him. But for my own part I had felt a singular feeling of relief at the sight of Albert Amsted Pudleigh alive and raging. I feared that the feeling was hardly consistent with true philanthropy. This imperfection in his removal had robbed it of some of its value to Humanity.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMPANY FINDS AN INVESTMENT

We drove to my rooms in the Temple, where we found Bottiger awaiting us. He told us that he had cashed the check without any difficulty, and we gave him the news of the resurrection of Albert Amsted Pudleigh. Our natural depression at the unforeseen thickness of the financial skull, which had balked our well-planned efforts to remove him, was deep indeed. It was but little relieved by the comfortable size of the subscription the effort had brought in, or by the thought that his return had relieved us utterly of all uneasiness about the doings of the police. We were sure that Pudleigh would do his best to hush up a business which might reveal to the East Surbiton widow how he came to lie by the Oval at midnight.

Bottiger handed over to me notes and gold to the amount of £4,115 8s. 6d. for the Children's Hospital. They warmed my heart. Two thousand pounds would have been good, but £4,000 seemed too good to be true. I burned to get off to Jamaica Place with them, but it was too late to go that

night. We dressed and dined at the Savoy, since Chelubai insisted on celebrating the receipt of the Company's first check in a befitting fashion.

I was in the highest spirits; my head was teeming with the details of the enlargement of the Children's Hospital. Angel and Bottiger had been cheered and brightened by the visit to the country, but Chelubai seemed depressed.

I asked him what ailed him, and he said heavily, "It's the thickness of that rascal Pudleigh's head."

"Never mind," I said, "you gave him a bad time, I'm sure. He didn't enjoy his stay in the hospital, and he was prevented stealing £8,000."

"I do like thorough conscientiousness in work," said Chelubai mournfully. "And it isn't only that, but we have failed to benefit Humanity. He is still alive to pursue his nefarious career."

"But you've benefited Humanity to the tune of over four thousand pounds! You've no idea what a help this will be in Stepney, none whatever," I said vehemently.

"I only look on that as a by-product of our real work. Our true mission is to benefit Humanity by removing its enemies," said Chelubai, uncomforted. "We ought to have put him out of harm's way."

"It is a pity that horrible man's alive to go on swindling people," said Angel sadly.

"There's no excuse for me. I ought to have made a better job of him," said Chelubai.

"Couldn't you have another try at him?" said Angel brightly.

Chelubai shook his head and said: "I'm afraid not. There'll be no getting within a hundred yards of him for the next three years. He'll jump ten yards whenever he sees his own shadow."

"Anyhow, it's a blessing that we haven't got to worry any more about what the police are up to," said Bottiger cheerfully.

"That's a very personal way of looking at it —there's an element of selfishness in it," said Chelubai.

"Well, my head does feel tighter on my shoulders," said Bottiger stubbornly.

"You mustn't be discouraged by a partial failure at the beginning; wait till we get our hands in," said I in a cheering tone.

"Oh, I'm not discouraged. I'm like Bruce and the spider: a check like this only makes me more strenuous," said Chelubai. "I'm for our going into it more earnestly than ever."

"Yes, that's my feeling. And I think we ought to set about making a list of all the heirs we know at once."

"Why of the heirs?" said Angel.

"Because always behind an heir you find an enemy of Humanity—an objectionable person with money," said I.

"I'm beginning to dislike this idea of yours of always having our removable subscribed for," said Chelubai. "It doesn't leave space enough for the ideal."

"As a good Socialist, I'm bound to be practical —even in philanthropy," I said firmly. "The idea of killing two birds with one stone, of knocking an enemy of Humanity on the head and subsidizing my hospital with the same sand-bag, appeals to me very strongly. Besides, what else did we form the company for but to run our enterprise on those lines?"

"Yes, there is that," said Chelubai. "But I do long for one pure, romantic removal—something high-souled. However, I mustn't fix romance with philanthropy—real, business-like philanthropy—it never works. I expect that this failure with Amsted A. Pudleigh's thick skull has shaken me."

"Well, we'll make out that list of heirs," said I; and I made haste to get the talk away from our work, to divert his attention from his failure. After a while I succeeded, and he grew quite cheerful telling Angel stories about the life of Shanghai.

The next morning's post brought me in three checks; the passing monetary cloud had lifted. At the end of breakfast, I said to Angel: "My money has come in, and now there is no longer any rea-

son for you remaining in this compromising position. We must find some rooms for you."

Then I sighed.

Angel looked at me quickly, and then her eyes fell. "I expect you have found me awfully in the way," she said.

"Nothing of the kind!" I said with some heat. "It's been delightful having you here. I think it suits me to have some one to look after. It makes life more interesting."

"It's been awfully nice, being looked after. I've not been so happy since my father died," she said simply.

"And it's been awfully nice having a companion —a—an intimate friend to talk to."

"I've found that," she said.

We were silent, and it was being borne in upon me that I should find her going a good deal of a wrench.

"I suppose I ought to go," she said. "But I shall find it very lonely."

"No, you won't find that. You'll see plenty of us—Chelubai and Bottiger and myself. We shan't let you be lonely."

"It won't be at all the same though," she said with a sigh.

"No, worse luck, it won't."

She was silent again; then she looked at me and said, "You like having me here? Really?"

"You know I do. I never heard of a brother and sister getting on better together."

"Then why shouldn't I stay?"

My sense of the proprieties rose in revolt; but an equally strong feeling that it was a purely artificial, unworthy sense rose with it. I said weakly, "It's very tempting."

"There's nothing really wrong in it, is there?" she said, looking at me squarely in the eyes.

"No, there is not. But people are evil-minded, and we have to reckon with that fact. And these things have a way of coming out."

"No one knows that you're not my brother. Indeed, no one this side of Cumberland knows anything about me," she said thoughtfully.

"No. And only Chelubai and Bottiger and Mrs. Plimsoll know that you are staying here. And I could always answer for Chelubai and Bottiger."

"Yes; even if they found out we were not really brother and sister, they would not say anything."

"Really, I don't think that they are very likely to find out. And we're not likely to tell them—not at present, at any rate."

"Why should we ever?" she said, opening her eyes.

"Oh, we might have to."

"Then I shall stay," she said joyfully. "After all, the Company should keep together. We can work better."

"Of course we can," I said, with hearty agreement.

We sighed in unison; but this time they were sighs of relief.

She was silent a while, then she said: "And there's another thing. It's costing you a lot of money my staying here. How ever am I going to pay you?"

"It's costing me nothing," I protested. "And any way brothers don't let their sisters pay. Besides, you do the housekeeping and help me review novels. I ought to pay you."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "It's—it's horrid having to talk about money. But I must. I can't let you pay for me—I couldn't, really. My father was always so keen that I should be very particular in those matters. And I really couldn't stand the feeling that I was a burden on you."

"Well, well, you shall pay up when Morton has disentangled your affairs, and the Granite quarry is working again."

"But Mr. Morton gave me to understand that the Granite quarry was lost," she said, knitting her brow.

"He was wrong—quite wrong. I got hold of a paper, when we dealt with Pudleigh by the Oval, which puts quite another complexion on your affairs. In a year or so, when we've got the Company cleared and working properly again, you'll

be a rich young woman. Till then you can very well let me be your banker. I tell you what, I'll start you with a banking account of your own, then your pass-book will tell you exactly how we stand whenever the time comes to settle."

The plan pleased me greatly, for I had several times already been face to face with the necessity and the awkwardness of giving Angel pocket-money for her private wants, and found it quite impossible to find a way. Her good fortune at Bridge had helped me, so far, over the difficulty; but here was the proper arrangement.

Angel's eyes shone with pleasure and gratitude, and she said, " That will be nice."

Accordingly, we went round to the bank. I paid my checks into my account, and started Angel with a banking account of thirty pounds. I explained to her the art of drawing checks and keeping an eye on one's balance.

Then I took her back to the Temple, for I would not take the risk of letting her come to the hospital, since Sister Elizabeth, who ran it, was not only a friend, but a second cousin of mine. I put the four thousand pounds into my breast pocket, took a hansom, bought ten pounds of grapes on the way, and came to Jamaica Place.

I was taken straight to Sister Elizabeth's room and found her over the accounts. As I have said, she runs the hospital. She is chief of the nursing

staff, secretary and housekeeper. All the burden of responsibility rests on her shoulders. They are good broad shoulders, for she weighs sixteen stone, if she weighs an ounce. Yet she moves about as softly as a man of ten stone who keeps his muscles hard. Her round, kind face brightened with a smile at the sight of me, and she said: "I'm very pleased to see you, Roger. Those checks you sent were a godsend. We have come out at the end of the quarter with a balance to the good—a balance of £43 4s. 7d."

These were the checks of Chelubai and Bottiger.

"I'm glad of it," I said cheerfully.

"I'm not asking how you got them, and I don't care. I—I'd take Rockefeller's tainted money joyfully, if he would send it this way. Those checks were a godsend, and I'm thankful to you for them. God truly moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

Sister Elizabeth has convinced herself by some odd feminine mental process that I am a very wicked young man about town. Simple soul that she is, she believes my Bridge to be a form of reckless gambling; and she knows that some of the proceeds of a run of good luck always come to the hospital. I never try to shake her conviction. Why should I? It pleases her, and it does not hurt me. She lives among saints, but she has a liking for sinners—those sinners who do not

grind her poor. That is the reason why she is a power in Plaistow.

I laughed and said cheerfully: "The contributions of bad lots thankfully received, eh? Well, I've brought you some more—four thousand pounds odd."

"You're joking!" she cried in a scared voice.

"Joking?" I said. "Here are the good, gray notes. And I pulled them out and laid them on the table.

She stared at them, open-mouthed, the color fading out of her plump, red face. Then to my horror she burst into tears and fairly howled—just like a crying child.

"F-f-four—thousand—p-p-pounds!" she stammered. "It's—it's—a gift from heaven! Oh, the children! The children!"

I could not connect Honest John Driver with heaven, though he was a Whole-Hog Wapshot. But then the sum was hardly his gift.

I said: "Come, come, don't break down like that. It's a contribution from four philanthropists of my acquaintance."

Then I let her howl.

She pulled herself together presently, and was once more the composed, capable woman.

Then she wanted to thank me, but I said: "Look here, you've given twenty-five years of your life to the children. Do you think you ought to be

thanking me for a piece of work which took up the odd hours of less than a fortnight. Drop it."

"I won't, if you don't like it," she said, almost humbly.

We got to the discussion of the spending of the money, the renting of the house next door, the cost of fitting it up, of the extra nurses and doctor. She thought that the money would run to thirty cots for two years. She is so sanguine. On the other hand, I knew that not ten pounds of it would be wasted.

When we had worked it out, she said: "And now you'd like to come round the wards."

"I won't!" I said firmly. "I've been over them once, and mine is the kind of mind that sort of thing sticks in. I don't need to. I shall do my best without seeing those wards again."

With that I took my leave, and caught a train back to town.

The next day we made out our list of heirs, and it contained seventeen names, after we had crossed out of it all whom it was hopeless to reckon possible contributors to the cause of Humanity. Angel and I took up our pleasant joint life with a new sense of its permanence; and I am bound to confess that I was idler by far than either Chelubai or Bottiger in throwing myself in the way of heirs of my acquaintance, and sounding them as to the virtues, or lack of virtues, of those

from whom they would inherit. Chelubai assured me that he was proving himself a hustler at philanthropy, but he complained bitterly that he was being balked by a great deal of callous indifference to the crying needs of Humanity.

One morning an advertisement in the *Times* caught my eye. It ran: "£100 *reward.* Lost, a small black bag containing papers of no use to any one but the owner. Any one bringing the same to A. Amsted Pudleigh, Esquire, 209B Old Jewry, E. C., will receive the above reward."

The advertisement reminded me somewhat sharply that I had been neglecting Angel's interest in the Quorley Granite Company. I had no very great desire to establish her in the position of heiress, and risk breaking our pleasant relationship; but there was no getting away from the duty, and, taking with me the transfer of her shares to Albert Amsted Pudleigh, I bent my steps to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

I found Morton at work, and after I had talked with him a while of other matters, I said: "By the way, in the matter of the Quorley Granite Company, are you sure that the forty thousand shares of Miss Pavis which her idiot guardian sold to Pudleigh are worth any more than the £200 he gave for them?"

"Well," said Morton, "her father drew two thousand a year out of it for a good many years.

It is only since her fool of a trustee let Pudleigh turn it into a company for the purpose of raising capital to extend its operations that its revenue has sunk, till now it hardly pays its working expenses."

"Mismanagement, I suppose."

"Deliberate mismanagement, of course, to depreciate its value till Pudleigh has bought up all the shares at sixpence apiece or so, and put it in his pocket. Then it will pay again, and with improved methods he will draw five or six thousand a year out of it."

"But I suppose the public subscribed for the shares. What's become of the money?"

"Only fifteen thousand were ever really issued, and that money's gone in the expenses of promotion and directors' fees."

"Beautiful simplicity," I said, with gentle admiration.

"Infernal rascality!" said Morton hotly.

"But have you any evidence that Pudleigh really bought the forty thousand shares of Miss Pavis?"

"Evidence? Well, Pudleigh, or rather the Company, would have the transfer, of course, and we have the entry of Pudleigh's check for £200 in the trust account."

"Do you know whether the shares are now registered in Pudleigh's name, or still in the name of Miss Pavis?"

"I don't. But what difference does it make? Her trustee had full power to sell them."

"But did he sell them? Is there a transfer in existence, or, rather, could Pudleigh or the Company produce it?"

"What do you mean? What are you driving at?" said Morton, somewhat puzzled.

I showed him Pudleigh's advertisement.

"What has this got to do with it?"

"One of the documents in that bag he wants so badly was that very transfer. In fact, here it is." And I drew it from my pocket and gave it to him.

He took it and looked through it, and said, "It's quite in order."

"Oh, quite," I said. "But suppose you were to dispute the sale of the shares, could he produce it?"

Morton rose and walked across the room looking exceedingly uncomfortable. "We shall have to give it back to him, I suppose," he said weakly.

"It isn't a case of we, it's a case of I," said I, taking up the transfer from his desk. "And I do not propose to give it back to him at all. It would be merely putting a premium on roguery."

"There is that point of view, of course," said Morton; and he looked out of the window, fidgeting on his feet.

"And it's good enough for me," said I. "In

fact, I'm going to consider the loss of this document my contribution to the cause of the orphan," I added, with generous warmth.

"It would be felony!" said Morton.

"My good chap," I said stiffly, "I should never dream of committing felony. There is no such thing as felony till it's proved."

"That's true, of course," said Morton. "But still——"

"However," I broke in, "that doesn't concern you. The important thing for you is that you can reckon your client to be worth 40,000 shares in the Quorley Granite Company."

Morton's face cleared a little as he said: "It's not the way we like to do business, but with a man of that stamp we can very well follow the old rule, admit nothing and ask for proof. I can't understand, though, how it is he didn't register the shares at once."

"It is odd. But I think that the fact of the matter is that for some months Pudleigh has been very busy with a splendid plant called Amalgamated Fertilizers. It has filled up his time; but now he and his accomplices have unloaded, and it's my impression that he was going to set about gathering up the Quorley Granite Company when he lost his bag."

"That's very likely," said Morton, and his face grew yet brighter as he added: "This puts a very

different complexion on Miss Pavis's affairs."

"The shares of the Quorley Granite Company ought to be worth something."

"If we could get the Company out of Pudleigh's hands, and set it going again, they would indeed."

"That means that we want the control of anything over 50,000 shares, and you already control 40,000. If we could get hold of another 10,000 we could shunt the Pudleigh gang, and put in another board of directors."

"Exactly. And this reminds me that I don't know what has become of Miss Pavis of late. I haven't seen her for more than three weeks. I must make inquiries."

"Yes, she's grown worth inquiring about," I said heartily, and damped Morton's zeal at once, as I knew I should, for he was of a sensitiveness unusual in a lawyer.

"Perhaps—perhaps," he said, with some hesitation, "I had better wait till I have really good news for her."

As I walked back to the Temple, I tore the transfer into small pieces, scattering them along the gutter as I went.

When I reached home, I had a long talk with Angel about the quarry, and she gave me a good deal of information of the means by which Pudleigh had depreciated its value. Customers had been allowed to slip away, or had been driven

away by the slovenly execution of their orders; the staff of workmen had been reduced till the output was but a tithe of what it had been. When the rest of the General Philanthropic Removal Company came to my rooms at tea-time on the pretence of being eager to play Bridge—really to see Angel—I was ready for them.

"I have a new idea," I said. "I've found a way of endowing that hospital at very small cost to ourselves. You remember my telling you that Pudleigh, who played that scurvy trick on us at the Oval, by means of the disgraceful thickness of his skull, had stolen a granite quarry from an orphan. Now, I suggest that we set about taking that quarry out of his pocket. The capital is £100,000 in one-pound shares. I can control 40,000 shares. If we buy 11,000—and we can get them very cheap—for the Children's Hospital at Stepney we shall kill three birds with one stone instead of our usual two. We shall restore the fortunes of the unlucky orphan, we shall provide the hospital with a small regular income which will pay its rent and gas bill, and we shall take it out of Pudleigh for going about with such a thick skull."

"I don't quite like the idea of mixing up a private grudge with benefiting Humanity," said Chelubai earnestly. "It doesn't keep it on the higher plane."



There was a thud and down he went.—Page 55

"Well, then we will dismiss from our minds the thought of taking it out of Pudleigh, and think only of the orphan and the hospital," said I.

"I want to take it out of the sweep. Think of poor old Chantrey," said Bottiger savagely.

"I'm bound to say the chance of playing a square financial game attracts me," said Chelubai. "One doesn't often get it."

With that I gave him some of the Quorley Granite Company documents I had had from Morton, when I gave his firm counsel's opinion on the matter.

He studied them for a while with the eye of an expert. Then he said: "The proper place for British investors is an asylum for imbeciles. Look at the cost of promotion and the directors' fees. What fools they are!"

I expressed my warm and professional agreement with his estimate of the investor's intelligence. Then we deliberated. The upshot was that we made up our minds to begin buying Quorley Granite shares at once, to buy them slowly and without ceasing till they rose to a shilling, then stop and let them sink till the time came to buy again.

The next day, accordingly, we instructed a broker to begin buying them for the Children's Hospital, and I went again to see Morton, and begged him to ascertain for us who were the share-

holders in the Company, that when the time came we might invoke their aid to make a clean sweep of the Pudleigh gang.

By the end of the week we owned fifteen hundred shares.

CHAPTER IX

BOTTIGER'S PHILANTHROPIC INSPIRATION

I FOUND myself too busy for some time with the task of attending, in the proper, brotherly fashion, to the work of broadening Angel's mind by a careful study of the picture galleries, architecture and theatres of London, to give the time to philanthropy I ought to have done. I questioned heirs but rarely. But in Chelubai and Bottiger philanthropy seemed to have grown a veritable passion, for they were continually sounding heirs. They made inquiries of them about the people from whom they were due to inherit, about their characters and tastes and the part they were playing in the world, whether it was good or evil. Also they inquired, with I hoped sufficient caution, of the heirs themselves whether they felt inclined to subscribe to the great Cause of Human progress, in the event of a speedy and unexpeeted inheritance. These inquiries were singularly unfruitful; Chelubai and Bottiger complained that they were everywhere hampered by false sentiment and a distressing timidity. For my part, I was inclined to suspect a lack of tactfulness in the inquiries,

since one day Chelubai came to me in a fuming indignation because a middle-aged clerk in the Bank of England had asked him if he took him for a murderer.

I let Chelubai unload his overburdened soul. Then I said: "I'm afraid you must have put it to him very badly, if he could so misunderstand you."

"Perhaps I did. Perhaps I did," said Chelubai. "But that's the worst of enthusiasm—one gets carried away."

"You ought not to. You have had a business training; and if it is not as absolutely useless as I have always suspected, it ought to have taught you restraint."

"I suppose it ought," said Chelubai.

"Of course when one thinks of Humanity, one is apt to get carried away," I said. "But I think when you are sounding an heir you should try to persuade yourself that you are not engaged in a glorious philanthropic enterprise, but merely in a cold business transaction. Then you would keep cool, and not lay yourself open to misconception."

"But one gets enthusiastic in business, too," said Chelubai.

"A morbid enthusiasm—and not to the same extent as in philanthropy," said I.

"That's true. I'll try going more gently, any way," said Chelubai; and he seemed comforted by my suggestion.

The next day he put my point of view to Bottiger, and I think they decided to give gentler enthusiasm a trial. If they did, it proved barren of results.

One evening I was returning their hospitality to Angel and myself during the black fortnight when I had been short of money, by giving them a dinner at the Savoy, and they came to it in very poor tempers. Chelubai was fuming; Bottiger was brick-red with fury. It came out that they had fallen victims to Sir Reginald Blackthwaite; they had in turn been his partner at bridge for two rubbers. Sir Reginald Blackthwaite is the club bore, and probably the worst bridge player in Europe. He is a round, tubby man of forty-five, provided with an inexhaustible fund of tedious anecdote. He insists on thrusting his victims into corners and flooding their dazed brains with his interminable views on the fiscal question. He suffers, too, from that debased form of humor which finds expression in punning, and he greets each of its efforts with a bleating gurgle, which in him does duty for a laugh.

Chelubai and Bottiger burst out upon us together with the recital of the horrible fate which had befallen them. There was nothing Sir Reginald had not done. He had revoked, he had trumped their best cards, he had declared spades when he should have declared no trumps, he had

declared no trumps when he should have declared spades.

"He is the limit!" cried Chelubai furiously.

"He wants his neck wringing!" cried Bottiger, with greater fury.

They paused for want of breath, and we expressed our deep sympathy with them. Indeed, I had never seen either of them so moved. The beads of sweat stood on Chelubai's lofty brow; Bottiger's eyes were slightly bloodshot.

Then Bottiger said, "That's an enemy of Humanity, if you like!"

"His removal would be a boon to the human race," said Chelubai, with fervent ardor.

As a bridge player, and one who had suffered from Sir Reginald, I sympathized with them, and I listened with complacency while they debated several painful methods of removing him. It cooled their wrath, and I made haste to change the subject. Bitter as their wrongs had been, I could not let them spoil Angel's evening.

I thought no more of the matter for some days. Then one afternoon Chelubai took Angel to a matinée, and Bottiger and I went to the Warwickshire to play bridge. We were playing together in a rubber, and Noel Blackthwaite, Sir Reginald Blackthwaite's nephew and heir, was my partner. Presently Sir Reginald himself came in and toddled—though but fifty-five he had already reached

the toddling age—up to the table. It is a mistake for a man and his heir to belong to the same club, and Noel and Sir Reginald often bickered freely, with a family frankness, which I found engaging but other members annoying. Noel's bitterness against his uncle was the fruit of the dinners with him—he could not shirk them—at which he had to listen, with a show of intelligent interest, to his uncle's views on the fiscal question.

At once Sir Reginald began to criticise Noel's play. His criticisms were delivered with the air of an expert and were utterly absurd. Noel's eyes began to sparkle, and a dusky redness mantled his cheeks and chin. He contradicted his uncle four times flatly. Then Sir Reginald came into the rubber, and he and Noel cut as partners. Sir Reginald's play always afflicts me with a dazed amazement which puts me off my game. He played two hands with a masterly imbecility which gave us a large rubber. His nephew criticised his play in every hand with an infuriated bitterness; he criticised his nephew's play with an expert's haughty superiority. Their faces warmed slowly to an even tint of purple.

At the end of the rubber, Sir Reginald said: "I would sooner play with a congenital idiot," rose and toddled haughtily out of the room.

Noel looked after him, and gasped. Only his youth saved him from an apoplectic seizure. "I—

I'm hanged if ever I play with the old idiot again!" he said.

Suddenly I saw Bottiger's honest English face brighten with an almost continental intelligence, and he said to Noel, with a curious eager air, "The old man is breaking up fast."

"Breaking up fast!" cried Noel. "He's as strong as a horse!"

"He's not long for this world; he has changed very much lately," said Bottiger obstinately.

"Rubbish!" cried Noel. "I never saw him look better. He—he's good for—for another twenty years!"

"He won't be alive three months from to-day," said Bottiger, looking more like an aggravating mule than a fine upstanding young Englishman.

The exasperated Noel snorted like a war-horse in his wrath. "Look here!" he cried. "I—I'll bet you five thousand to a tenner that he is!"

"Done!" said Bottiger quietly. "Let's see—to-day's the twenty-fifth, isn't it?" And he entered the bet in his betting book.

"When you two have quite finished, we might play bridge," said the man whom Sir Reginald had cut out of the table.

We began another rubber.

I had not paid any great attention to the bet. Men are always making silly bets, and Bottiger will bet about anything. But I observed that he

showed a very fine conceit of himself for the rest of the afternoon. He came back with me to the Temple, where we found Angel and Chelubai awaiting my return.

When we came into the room, his first words were, "I've got another job for the Company."

"Good!" said Chelubai, and Bottiger broke into the triumphant narration of the incident of the bet.

I was taken aback, but at the end of it Chelubai said, with cold ferocity, "I don't think there's a man in England I should have greater pleasure in removing."

"Oh, come," I protested. "You're not going seriously to maintain that that old blatherer Blackthwaite is an enemy of Humanity?"

"Not an enemy of Humanity? You should have seen him trump my nine of spades last Friday," said Chelubai.

"You should have seen the no-trumper he declared on Monday," said Bottiger.

There was a baleful glare in their eyes.

"Has he ever talked to you about the fiscal question?" said Chelubai.

"He has to me," said Bottiger, and he laughed horribly.

"This is a very reprehensible spirit," I said firmly. "You propose to divert an organization

formed for the deliverance of Humanity to the destruction of your private enemies."

"Ain't I a part of Humanity? That's what I want to know," said Bottiger.

"Consider the evil passions he arouses, not only in us but in every one at the club, in the card-room and out of it. A man who arouses passions of that kind and injures noble natures is an enemy of Humanity," said Chelubai solemnly.

"And you call yourself a Socialist!" sneered Bottiger.

"The Socialist abhors violence," I said quickly. "I don't consider him sufficiently an enemy of Humanity to make him a fitting job for the Company."

"That's for the majority of the Directors to decide," said Chelubai. "Bottiger and I are in favor of it. What do you say, Miss Brand?"

"I vote with Roger," said Angel quickly.

"Sakes alive!" said Chelubai. "If we haven't forgotten to make provision for a casting vote when the Directors are equally divided on a point!"

They were silent a while, considering the deadlock. I filled a pipe and lighted it.

Then Chelubai said plaintively: "I can't understand your opposition, Roger. You wouldn't let us run our scheme on pure romantic lines. You would have made it practical. as a means of col-

lecting contributions to your hospital. Now here's five thousand good pounds for your hospital, and you kick."

"I don't think Sir Reginald sufficiently an enemy of Humanity to justify our removing him even to get five thousand pounds for the Children's Hospital," I said firmly; and from that standpoint I would not budge.

Chelubai argued with me; Bottiger blustered at me. I remained unshaken.

At last Chelubai said thoughtfully: "If it were ten thousand pounds for your hospital, I reckon you'd climb down and come in with us."

"Well, I admit that that would be a temptation that might break me down. Thank goodness, it isn't ten thousand pounds," I said.

"I see," said Chelubai, still thoughtful; and presently they took their leave coldly.

I was not long learning that we had not done with Sir Reginald Blackthwaite. I found myself up against the American keenness of Chelubai and Bottiger's dogged English tenacity. Indeed, Bottiger's enthusiasm to rid the European section of Humanity of its worst bridge player transformed him. He became a sleuth-hound, dogging the toddle of the unconscious Sir Reginald, in a passionate hope of discovering that he was the prey of some Platonic attachment, which would

bring him into a quiet corner to be knocked on the head at midnight.

Bottiger insisted on imparting to me the fruits of his research. I learned that Sir Reginald was a man of most regular habits; at noon every day he left his house in Berkeley Square, sauntered down to Piccadilly, along it, up the left-hand side of Regent Street, and down the right-hand side of it. All the way he ogled every pretty woman he met, with unflagging but bootless perseverance. Now and again he would turn and follow one for fifty or a hundred yards, toddling himself along with the air of a dauntless buck of a fortunately bygone age, his face shining with a captivating, infantine smile to which his faultless false teeth lent a brilliant radiance. This walk, with these engaging breaks in it, took him an hour and a half; and at half-past one he was at the entrance to the Café Royal. There he made a lengthy, generous lunch, drinking with it a bottle of champagne, and after it two or three liqueur brandies. At half-past three he lighted his second cigar, paid his bill, came out and went for a drive. He spent the rest of the afternoon and evening at the club, and went to bed at half-past ten.

Bottiger plied me with these details of Sir Reginald's wasted life that, by presenting him to me as a worthless member of society, he might weaken my reluctance to removing him. He enlarged with

simple eloquence on the horrors of gluttony and the captivating process in a man of Sir Reginald's age. I listened to his diatribes with patient politeness. Presently I found that his temper towards his proposed prey was growing worse, since Sir Reginald's habit of keeping early hours made it very difficult to find a reasonable opportunity for his removal. To Bottiger he assumed the forbidding appearance of a stubborn enemy impregnably entrenched behind the gas lamps of London.

Chelubai's method of overcoming my resolution was different. He nagged and nagged. He nagged at me about my blindness to the claims of Humanity; he nagged at me about my forgetfulness of the sick children, and he nagged at me for "gagging the dictates"—his own phrases—of my better nature. I often pained him by my truculence.

I withstood their efforts, and my resolution would have remained unbroken, for all my sympathy with their just wrongs as bridge players, had not Sir Reginald himself sapped it. By some accident Angel and I chanced to be lunching at the Café Royal.

In the middle of lunch she said: "There's such a funny old gentleman sitting behind you, and he keeps looking at me in the funniest way. I think his eyes are coming out of his head."

I turned, frowning, and looked into the chubby face of Sir Reginald Blackthwaite.

"How are you, Brand? How are you?" he said, with a geniality I found excessive and with a smile beyond words ingratiating.

"How are you?" I said, as civilly as I could, and I turned to my food.

"That's the bone of contention. That's the man who is splitting the Company and undermining the friendship of years—that's Sir Reginald Blackthwaite," I said to Angel, in a low voice.

"Oh, is it?" she said; and she looked at him with greater interest.

I gave him no more thought, but suddenly I perceived a very mischievous expression on Angel's face, and then I distinctly saw her employed in a languishing glance.

"Good heavens!" I said. "Are you making eyes at that old terror?"

"Oh, Roger, you know I wouldn't make eyes at any one! I wouldn't do anything so horrid!" she said plaintively.

"Of course not," I said, in a tone of utter disbelief, for I saw the corners of her mouth quiver with a repressed smile.

"You don't believe me. You're very distrustful," she wailed.

"Not at all. Mine is an ingenuous nature," I said peacefully.

She accepted the admission with suspicious haste, and turned indifferent eyes to Sir Reginald for the rest of lunch.

But the harm was done. I was just about to order coffee, when Sir Reginald asked if he might drink his at our table. It was impossible to refuse, since Angel was but my sister, and he came. He proceeded to placate any resentment I might feel by forcing upon me an excellent cigar and insisting on our having some old Grand Marnier, which he assured us the restaurant was keeping for him alone, since it had but a few bottles left. It was his privilege as one of its oldest habitués. Then he devoted himself to Angel. She was the very creature to be immeasurably attractive to the impressionable age of fifty-five, and I was very soon assured that with him it was a case of love at first sight. He set about the captivating process hammer and tongs. He worked the witty and gallant scheme for all it was worth. He told her long and pointless stories, punctuating them with appreciative chuckles; he made puns to her, and followed each with his gurgling bleat. At the end of half an hour she was casting appealing looks for help to me. She did not get any. She had brought him on herself; and, besides, it amused me to watch his burbling.

At the end of an hour, however, I relented, and snatched her from his grip. As she came out of

the restaurant with a dazed air, she said softly: "I—I think I understand why Mr. Kearsage and Sir Ralph are so keen on removing him."

I said nothing.

That night Chelubai said to me with a thoughtful air, "Sir Reginald Blackthwaite seems very much struck by your sister."

"He does," said I.

He remained thoughtful; but I suspected nothing. The next afternoon he brought Sir Reginald round to the Temple to tea and bridge. It was the act of a Machiavel. I saw his purpose at once; he meant Sir Reginald to inspire into us such a loathing that we, too, should grow eager for his removal. Sir Reginald gave him his best help: it *was* an afternoon, and it *was* bridge.

That was only the beginning. The next fortnight was a nightmare of Sir Reginald. He came to tea and bridge with a firm regularity no snubs could break. He made us lunch with him, he made us dine with him, he even set about widening Angel's life by imparting to her his views on the fiscal question. He was our Old Man of the Sea; we began to feel that we were justified in taking any measures to be rid of him. He was sweeping me off my moral legs.

At last I weakened. I told Chelubai and Bottiger that if they could find a way of getting another five thousand pounds out of his removal for

my Children's Hospital I would withdraw my opposition to the job.

Chelubai found the way. The very next day Sir Reginald was taking a voluble tea with us, and the talk fell on the making of wills. We learned, and goodness knows we had no desire to learn it, that Sir Reginald was in the throes of making his will. He described each throe to us twice, at length. Chelubai at once went into the matter of charitable bequests, and advocated with passionate warmth the claims of my Children's Hospital. His earnestness impressed Sir Reginald deeply; he agreed to leave five thousand pounds to it. It left us nothing to do but to remove him.

Had it not been that I felt that Chelubai had worsted me, I should have gone about the business with enthusiasm, so deep was the impression Sir Reginald had made upon me; as it was I went about it in a grudging spirit. Not even the thought of the £10,000 for the Children's Hospital quite cheered me.

Since his regular habits and his early hours rendered London unfit for his removal, our thoughts turned to the country. His habit of driving every afternoon relieved us of the necessity of luring him into it, and we resolved to avail ourselves of those drives to compass our end. One night he took Angel and me to the theatre. During an interval between the acts, Angel complained with

no little bitterness, and perfect truth, of the stuffiness of London, and declared her longing to get oftener into the freshness of the country. I said that she must have a bicycle; but Sir Reginald saw his chance, and broke in: "Why not come for a drive? I should be delighted to drive you out twenty miles or so, have lunch somewhere, and drive you back? It would be as pleasant a way of spending a day as I know. Besides, you'd be doing me a service—you would, really. I need fresh air, and I am so tired of driving out by myself. You'd be surprised how people stick to this stuffy town. I can't get any one to drive with me. I can't really."

Angel and I looked at one another—a queer look, I fancy.

"Yes, I should like it. It would be a relief," said Angel, with an excellent show of eagerness.

Accordingly, we arranged to drive out with him on the following Thursday. When Chelubai and Bottiger heard of the arrangement they agreed with me that we must try and arrange a carriage accident. On the Thursday we drove to Richmond. November is no month for driving in, and we started in a thin yellowish fog, and since we drove through the low, damp country south of London, it stayed with us all the way, only changing here and there to a dirty gray. However, thanks to her genuine passion for the poisonous

country air, Angel enjoyed the drive; and since she sat beside him on the box and talked to him, or rather he talked indefatigably to her, Sir Reginald enjoyed it too. I, sitting in the back of the phaeton beside an unusually stolid groom, was alone bored, and I could not comfort myself with the thought that my time was well spent, for carefully as I considered every part of the road, I could find no spot suited to a quiet, uninterrupted carriage accident of which we might take advantage to remove Sir Reginald.

When I told the company that night of this unfortunate disadvantage of the road to Richmond, Bottiger suggested that we should propose drives to the north of London, where the peaceful and deserted lanes of Hertfordshire would afford far greater advantages. He said that the village of Aldley on the Hill was affected somewhat by sightseers, since the view from the top of its church tower embraced a stretch of five counties.

"It sounds promising," I said. "We might throw him over the parapet. And at any rate we should get him away from the groom, who is not at all a fit person to remove, for he's an honest fellow with a wife and nine children dependent upon him."

"I don't see that he's an unfit person to remove at all!" said Chelubai quickly. "He's been guilty of over-populating the world!"

"You're too quick to catch at straws to serve your philanthropic purpose," I said severely. "I don't approve of removing the unobjectionable, and I'm sure that Angel doesn't."

"Certainly not. He looks a very respectable man," said Angel.

"Besides, a double removal at least quadruples the risk," I said. "However, it is plain that we must move slowly. The church tower at Aldley sounds indeed promising, but we must first drive there, and make a preliminary exploration of its conveniences."

"That means that your unfortunate sister will have to endure more of the society of that old terror," said Bottiger. "I tell you, it's very hard on her."

"Oh, I can stand it—if only it's going to be put a stop to, once and for all, very soon," said Angel, with a resigned air.

"We must not grudge the poor old fellow the gladdening of his last days by a few drives with my sister," I said.

"Poor old fellow! Unmitigated old ruffian! He declared diamonds on four to the queen at love—all yesterday!" cried Bottiger.

When Bottiger grows rabid about anything, he is touchy.

CHAPTER X

WE ARE FOILED AGAIN

Angel had no difficulty in persuading Sir Reginald to change the direction of the drives to the north of London, for he was in the mood to gratify any whim of hers. Accordingly, three days later we set out one morning to drive to Aldley on the Hill. For the first twelve miles the road lay on the great highway to the north which runs through Edgware and Hendon; then, beyond Stanmore, we turned off to the left and were among deserted lanes along which cyclists were not likely to be found in any numbers on account of the bad going. I saw countless spots naturally arranged for carriage accidents, could we drive out without the groom. We reached Aldley village at half-past one, and found that the church stood lonely on the top of the hill above it. It seemed best to lunch at the village inn first and explore the church afterwards. We did so, eating a genuine English village lunch; none of your country fare; the lands of the world seemed to have been ransacked to provide it. We ate, with what gusto we might, the mutton of Australia, the bacon of Canada, the

eggs of France and the butter of Denmark. These delicacies were followed by a pie, made of dried apple chips from California and the cheese of Tennessee. Only the coffee, the bread and the beer were English; the coffee was ground beans, the bread, half-baked, was sour, and the beer was swipes. Angel's appetite and mine were young, and we dealt firmly with these foods. Sir Reginald could only toy with them—if indeed he could be said to toy with dainties so uncompromising—nor was he cheered by the sight of a freshly opened tin of the milk of Switzerland to drink with his decoction of beans.

For the first time I saw his bubbling spirit chilled. He was, in spite of the presence of Angel, the grumpiest of the grumpy after lunch, and it was fortunate that he had brought with him a large flask of liqueur brandy. He had to half empty it and smoke two cigars before he was restored, not to cheerfulness, but to equanimity. He smoked the second cigar and drank the second half of the flask of brandy furtively, when the windings of the steps of the church tower hid him from Angel, during our exploration of the church. When we reached the top of the tower, as we had foreseen, the five sodden counties were veiled from our eyes by the November mist, and Angel cried: "Oh, this is disappointing! We must come here again!"

"Come here again! I'll be hanged—" cried Sir Reginald, checked himself, and went on with less vehemence. "Oh, yes, we'll come here again, but I'll bring a hamper with me. No more country fare for me—fare indeed!"

"On a clear day," said Angel, with a bright smile.

"On the very first clear day," said Sir Reginald, with one of his most languishing glances; and he added gallantly: "I shall pray for a clear day—I shall—I give you my word."

"Since you drive us, I think we must bring the hamper," I said.

"No," said Sir Reginald firmly. "I couldn't hear of it. You might let a—a foreign product slip in among your good things; and the sight of a foreign product will make me feel ill for months —except caviare."

I was not only disappointed in the matter of view, but in the far more important matter of the parapet. It was quite four feet high. How a baronet of fifty-five could contrive to fall over it by accident I could not think. It was plain that we must devise some method of getting rid of the groom and have a carriage accident. I came down the steep steps of the tower pondering how to effect this, when Sir Reginald disturbed the concentration of my mind by slipping, recovering himself, and crying out: "By Jove, one might

easily break one's neck down this staircase!"

His words gave me a new idea, and as I went down I looked at the staircase with different eyes. Thirty feet down it was a small door; I pushed it open, and saw the church bells.

We walked straight down to the village, and drove back to London. Sir Reginald came up to my rooms for some tea, and I had barely given him a whiskey and soda when Chelubai and Bottiger came; and we hardened our hearts harder by yet more bridge with him. The three of them got as near snarling as politeness allows, or even nearer. I enjoyed it, for I felt that as I had had the tiresome drive, they should in all justice have their share of Sir Reginald now. I have never been at an afternoon party at which the guests were so hard put to it to keep from flying at one another's throats, or the hostess so hard put to it to keep the peace. Angel showed an admirable tact and quickness.

When at last, with a last languishing glance and last compliment, Sir Reginald took his leave of us, Bottiger broke out, saying: "Really, Roger, I can't understand how you can allow that insufferable old ruffian to bore your sister all day—the drive was enough!"

I said severely: "The path of Philanthropy cannot be all roses. You should not expect it."

Chelubai said, with a very honorable warmth:

"I quite feel with Bottiger. It grates on me—grates on me."

"Your sentiments do both of you infinite credit," I said dryly. "But if we went into society we should meet him in the best drawing-rooms, boring the select. He is much sought after, for he is still marriageable."

Bottiger received this statement of fact with one of his ingenuous growls, and said grimly: "Well, he won't be marriageable long."

Chelubai looked depressed and said: "Is that really so? Is he really sought after? Well, perhaps I have been too hard on him."

"Well, now, let us be practical," I said, and I told them of our exploration, assuring them that the church tower was useless on account of the height of the parapet, and the bad roads on account of the groom. Then I put before them my estimate of the value of the tower steps.

Their faces, which had fallen, brightened when I talked of them, and when I had done, Chelubai said: "I'll use the handkerchief! I'm better at it than you are, and Bottiger must keep out of this operation because he made the bet."

"Certainly, if you insist on it," I said. "I wouldn't rob you of the practice on any account."

"I know you think I'm bloodthirsty," said Chelubai, with an apologetic air. "But I'm not, really; but in business I learnt to like thorough-

ness, and I haven't forgiven myself yet for my failure in the case of Albert Amsted Pudleigh."

"Don't let it distress you," I said. "You did your best."

"Ah, you Britishers lack conscientiousness," said Chelubai sadly. "How can we really satisfy our aspirations if we are not thorough? We started in to knock him on the head, and, failing to allow for the abnormal thickness of his skull, we did not do it. It was a failure."

Angel and Bottiger looked at him with somewhat perplexed faces, as if they could not quite follow his enthusiasm; but I understood, and I said warmly: "Yours is a noble nature, Chelubai! You want to redeem your character for conscientious thoroughness, and I will never stand in your way. You *shall* use the handkerchief."

Chelubai looked very pleased.

On the morrow he and I drove down to Aldley on the Hill in his motor-car. He agreed with me at once that the parapet afforded no specious excuse for an accident to an elderly baronet, but he was charmed with the steepness of the tower steps, and when I showed him the belfry door he cried with genuine enthusiasm: "Perfect! Perfect! The very place for me! I will lie in wait here, and you need only contrive that Sir Reginald comes down last."

We perceived that the hinges of the belfry door

had been disgracefully neglected, and going down to the car we brought up an oil can and oiled them. Then we moved the door backwards and forwards till it worked without a squeak. For about half an hour after that Chelubai practised springing quickly and silently out of it, with an earnest perseverance that set him perspiring freely. When he had become really expert, we descended and drove home.

A tiresome delay of nearly a fortnight followed while we waited for a clear day. Sir Reginald fell in my estimation. He fretted and fumed at the fog, he was almost in a fury about it; but he had not the wit to drive round in his phaeton one morning and assert that the day was clear. We should not have cavilled at the statement.

At last I awoke one morning to find that a strong southwest wind had cleared away the fog, and the sky was plainly to be seen. I was very cheerful at breakfast, but Angel was nervous and excited, paler than her wont, and showed a poor appetite. I reasoned with her gently on the unphilanthropic impropriety of this unfitting distress at the thought of cutting short the career of our appalling Old Man of the Sea, but to very little purpose. Sir Reginald drove up soon after breakfast, in his usual excellent spirits. I wired to Chelubai and we started. On the way down I saw that Angel could by no means throw off the

weight on her spirit; but that did not matter to Sir Reginald, who could, and did, talk for the two. I began to think that women might be very useful for such light philanthropic tasks as hocussing, but when it came to serious Philanthropy they lacked the firmness and resolution which are the peculiar attributes of sensible men. Yet, after all, Angel was very young; she might grow firmer with the years.

However, under the bracing influence of the south wind she brightened somewhat, and when we reached Aldley she was no longer pale. For her sake I should have liked to get the business over before lunch, but Sir Reginald was bent on lunching first and looking at the five counties afterwards; and since it was the last time he would entertain us, I did not care to balk his desire. Moreover, I thought of the last breakfast of the condemned criminal. It was an excellent lunch. Sir Reginald had sent down his cook and a footman to prepare and serve it, but to my extreme disgust I found myself unable to enjoy it as it deserved to be enjoyed. The thought that I was sharing the last meal of a condemned criminal kept forcing itself on me with most injurious effect to my palate. I was ashamed of my weakness, for, after all, Chelubai was going to be the actual deliverer of Humanity, not I. Angel seemed to be enjoying it as little as I, and our conversation kept

dying down. But Sir Reginald ate and talked for the three of us, whether it was the inspiration of Angel's presence, or the exhilarating drive, or the memory of the terrible country fare we had had to deal with on our last visit to Aldley, I do not know, but he ate, and ate largely, of everything, and drank as much as he ate. Two glasses of old brown sherry, half a bottle of hock, a bottle and a half of champagne and three glasses of liqueur brandy raised him to such a height of spirits as I have never seen in a human being.

After lunch he was almost boisterous; he no longer toddled, but skipped. Fortunately, at the foot of the tower he stopped us and told us a long, humorous anecdote. We were hardly in the mood for humor of any kind, and it is quite inconceivable that we could, at any moment in our lives, have been in the mood for humor of that kind. Every one of the gurgling bleats with which he starred it was an insult to our intelligence. My anger grew and grew; the truth of Chelubai's contention, that a man who could wantonly and without ceasing raise such an evil passion in a fellow creature was truly an enemy of Humanity, grew plainer and plainer. I saw that Angel's eyes were blazing with a fury as savage as my own.

"Let us go to the top of the tower," I said, in a choking voice.

Angel led the way with a resolute step. I per-

ceived that now nothing would induce her to lift a finger to save him. Sir Reginald bustled up after her. I followed in a cold, murderous fury. When he came out on the top of the tower he was very short of breath. Without waiting to recover it, he stuttered out a pun.

It was the last straw. I could scarcely wait for Chelubai and his handkerchief; only by the most violent effort could I refrain from hurling Sir Reginald into space. Then the thought of Chelubai's disappointment at the loss of his chance of retrieving his unfortunate error in the case of Albert Amsted Pudleigh gave me control over myself. I began to cool down.

We examined the five counties from the four sides of the tower. Sir Reginald made puns on the names of three of them—incredible puns—puns so base that I cannot soil this page with them. I seethed.

Then the need came on me to say something—anything. By some odd chance the thing I found to say was: "You've put down the Children's Hospital in Jamaica Place for £5,000 in your will, haven't you, Sir Reginald?"

"No," said Sir Reginald, with a gurgling bleat. "I've left the £5,000 to the Mission to the Patagonians. My great-aunt Amelia was interested in them."

My blood ran cold; he could not have cooled it

more effectually if he had thrown a bucket of cold water over me. If there is one thing I deplore, it is the diversion of the moneys of the charitable into foreign channels when they are so bitterly needed at home. I could be no party to this diversion. Moreover, I had made up my mind that Sir Reginald was only enough of an enemy of the human race to justify our removing him, if that removal meant £10,000 for my Children's Hospital.

My resolve was taken on the instant. I whispered to Angel, "The job is off!" and went down the steps.

When I came to the belfry door I opened it. There was Chelubai, masked.

"I'm ready for him," he said, gritting his teeth.

"The job's off!" I said curtly.

"Off—off? What for?" cried Chelubai.

"Idiots that we were, we never ascertained if he'd left the £5,000 to my Children's Hospital! He's left it to the Mission to the Patagonians instead."

"Well, what's the matter with the Patagonians? They're all right. There's no flies on the Patagonians," said Chelubai.

"There shall be no missionaries on them, either, if I can help it," I said bitterly. "Come along."

"No, no! I'm going to out him! Why—why

I just yearn to out him!" said Chelubai vehemently.

"Well, you're not going to. Five thousand for the Children's Hospital is not reason enough. You come along." And without more ado I seized his arm and dragged him, protesting, down the stairs.

He was still protesting violently, urging me to let him return and do the job, when Angel came out of the door at the bottom of the tower. She wore a very cheerful air; I could see that my change of purpose had been a great relief to her. I was relieved myself.

But when Sir Reginald followed her out, my face darkened, and I said sternly: "Sir Reginald, I have been deceived in you. You have proved yourself unworthy our acquaintance."

"Eh? What?" cried Sir Reginald, gaping at me.

"It is not your atrocious bridge," I said, hardening my heart as I thought of the wrongs Angel and I had endured at his hands. "It is not your anecdotes, nor your puns, nor your views on the fiscal question. It is that when a worthy object of charity was presented to your notice you preferred an unworthy one. You preferred the Patagonians to the sick children of Stepney——"

"God bless my soul! Is the man mad?" said Sir Reginald.

"That choice"—I went on in my best forensic manner—"shows a hideous deformity in your character which I cannot tolerate. I can no longer allow my sister to associate with you; I can no longer associate with you myself. We will return by train."

"B-b-but—" stammered Sir Reginald.

"Silence. I will hear nothing," I said, raising my hand. "Go—go to your Patagonians."

"Oh, damn the Patagonians!" said Sir Reginald.

"And these are the sentiments and language of the man who has left them £5,000 in his will. Come, Angel," said I; and I turned on my heel.

CHAPTER XI

ANOTHER LULL

Though Chelubai, to secure greater secrecy of movement, had come down to Aldley on the Hill on a motor-bicycle, he returned with us to town by train. He was crestfallen and melancholy, and heaped many reproaches on me for spoiling the execution of an admirably planned operation by what he called my childish fad.

Angel and I, on the contrary, were simmering with joy. Not only had we avoided a removal, of the propriety of which we were not entirely convinced, but also we had divested ourselves of the Old Man of the Sea with whom Chelubai had entwined us. The apparently trivial reason I had given for casting out Sir Reginald had made our breach with him far more difficult to repair than if I had alleged a more serious cause. But when I grew tired of Chelubai's melancholy injustice, with some malice I explained to Angel that though she and I were for ever free from the bridge and conversation of Sir Reginald, Chelubai and Bottiger would still endure both, would still have to suffer the penalty of the imprudent encourage-

ment they had given him. Chelubai, I knew, could never bring himself to quarrel with a baronet of James I. creation; and Bottiger had some honest belief that in an age of Socialism baronets should hold together. Of course that belief had not prevented him from arranging the substitution of Sir Noel for Sir Reginald; but Sir Reginald still existing, Bottiger would stand by him against the world of commoners. I succeeded in bathing Chelubai in an even deeper gloom.

Bottiger, who had spent the earlier part of the afternoon showing himself at the club twenty miles from the scene of the expected fatal accident, was awaiting us at the Temple.

His first eager words were, "Did you out him?"

"We did not," I said. "At the very last moment I found that he had failed to comply with my conditions. He had left the £5,000 to the Mission to the Patagonians instead of to the Children's Hospital. That ended the matter."

Then the fun, or rather the fury, began. Bottiger raged and Bottiger stormed, and Chelubai, no longer unsupported, stormed with him. By a childish fad I had ruined a magnificent scheme. . . . I had rendered vain the labor they had given to it. . . . I had wasted the time they had spent on it. . . . I had brought it about that they had endured intolerable anxiety for

nothing. . . . I was self-centred to the last shameless degree . . . my selfishness was disgusting.

They came to the end of their breath about the same time; then I took up the tale. "I like your cheek," I said sternly. "Your labor indeed! It was I and my sister who had the labor and anxiety for nothing! We perfected the scheme, and we labored at it. While you were taking your inglorious eases at the bridge table, she and I were sweating beneath the burden of Sir Reginald's conversation—we bore the brunt of his anecdotes. All we left to you was two simple details of the scheme, the bequest of £5,000 to my Children's Hospital, and the mere trivial detail of the actual removal. You bungled the scheme. You let Sir Reginald leave the £5,000 to the Mission to the Patagonians."

"Oh, damn the Patagonians!" said Bottiger; and with that they took their leave in cold furies.

For three days we saw nothing of them. I began to fear that they were engaged in removing Sir Reginald on their own account. My distrust of Chelubai's keen enthusiasm and Bottiger's bull-dog tenacity occasioned me grave anxiety lest they should be betrayed by them into some rash removal and be discovered. Then I learned with relief that Sir Reginald was confined to his bed with a severe attack of gout, the result doubtless

of emotion, and out of their reach. On the fourth day Chelubai and Bottiger appeared sheepishly at tea-time, armed with a basket of peaches, a wonderful cake and a large box of exquisite chocolate creams—peace-offerings. We accepted the amend with dignity, and all was forgiven and forgotten.

Our ruined scheme for the removal of Sir Reginald Blackthwaite was followed by a long period of inactivity. We did not indeed relax in our philanthropic efforts to get a job. Severally we sounded, with great caution and delicacy, eleven promising persons, but to no purpose. Even Chelubai and I, who have acquired—he in Shanghai, I in London—a somewhat unfavorable opinion of the human race, were shocked at the false sentimentality, the callous indifference, to the crying needs of Humanity which prevail amongst heirs. I am bound to admit that these base qualities were often strengthened by cowardice, but the greater part of their reluctance to promote our enterprise arose from them. Bottiger seemed, indeed, to consider their behavior not unnatural; and I was grieved to observe that it did not excite in Angel the indignant scorn it should.

In the meantime, we went on buying little blocks of Quorley Granite Company Shares; and Morton in a quiet and quite unobtrusive way investi-

gated the working of the quarries. They were indeed being worked in such a fashion as to produce but a tithe of what they could produce with a full equipment of labor and machinery.

Moreover, Morton had obtained another most useful piece of information. He learned that her dead trustee's housekeeper, the witness of the shares' transfer, had witnessed the signing of so many documents connected with Angel's affairs that she had no knowledge at all of the contents of any one of them. And of this forgetfulness he proposed to take the fullest advantage, in the interests less of the law than of justice.

He had very little fear that Pudleigh would fight the case, since a rising or risen King of Finance can hardly be got into a witness-box by anything weaker than a traction-engine. But I often conferred with him about the matter, for we were resolved, both the General Philanthropic Removal Company and Morton, to be prepared at every point, if it should come to a fight. When, presently, I found him greatly put about by the disappearance of Angel, at my suggestion he advertised for her, and at my suggestion she went to see him. He was relieved to learn that she was living with a friend, and in no want of money. She gave him an address at Battersea where I had once lodged, and I arranged with the landlady that all letters coming for her there

should be forwarded to me at the Temple. It was probable, indeed, that I should know beforehand if Morton wanted to see her in an emergency, quickly; and she could anticipate his letter asking her to call on him.

I was glad to have this matter off my mind, for I had been no little afraid lest Morton should interrupt our domesticity; and since Angel and I fitted more and more into one another's lives, I was loth indeed that that should happen. I doubt that many brothers and sisters enjoy as close a kinship in interests and tastes as we did, or attain to as exact an understanding of one another. Insensibly I fell into the position of the complete elder brother—as was only natural seeing that she was but a child for all the keenness of her intelligence. I prevented her doing foolish things, with considerable firmness. I looked upon her, I fancy, as rather more of a child than she really was; for after all her days of loneliness and adversity had had a somewhat forcing effect on her development, and she was older than her sixteen years. However, she did not resent it; she liked me to look after her so carefully, and I liked doing it. I found her such a delightful child that I looked forward to her growing into a woman with no little displeasure. We were very well as we were, and any change could but be for the worse.

We were affluent, too, after having endured hard times; an agreeable position. Our tastes were simple, and Angel grew a better and better housekeeper. A gentle, continuous stream of briefs began to flow in. I made Angel happier by letting her write the reviews of a good many of the novels sent to me. She had a natural good judgment, and I only had to rewrite or later correct them into the befitting English.

But if we, in our simplicity, were content, and disposed to be careless of the fact that the G. P. R. C. was doing no business, Chelubai and Bottiger shared neither our content nor our carelessness. The passion for practical philanthropy had taken hold of them. Their consciences were harassed by the need to be actively furthering the progress of Humanity. They were for ever harping on the question of removals, and kept me busy considering and rejecting their suggestions.

At last it fell to me to come to the aid of their distressed consciences. I was walking along Fleet Street late one bitterly cold December afternoon, when a very shabby young man gave me a glance of half-recognition, and hurried by me with a shame-faced air. For a moment I could not remember him, then knew him for Marmaduke Jubb, a son of Jubb and Symons' famous Ne Plus Ultra Pickles, whom I had coached for his Pass degree at Oxford some four years before. I called after him, "Hallo, Jubb!"

He seemed half inclined to hurry on, changed his mind and stopped.

I shook hands with him, invited him to drink with me, and we turned into one of the numerous bars which are so surely ousting the newspaper offices from that neighborhood. In the bright light of the electric lamps I saw him more clearly, and I was surprised at the change in his air and dress. He had been a young man of a rounded, sleek and contented face, with an excellent opinion, hardly so well founded as it might have been, of his looks, deportment and intelligence. His taste in dress had been for the florid, and had found expression in boldly checkered tweeds and ornate cravats sustained by large jewelled pins—even Oxford had been unable to thin his massive gold Albert. Now on his gaunt and haggard face was the hunted air of a man at loggerheads with Fortune; his top-hat was brown with age and weather, and napless round the edge of the crown; his morning coat was green about the seams, and in the bitter cold he wore no overcoat.

He chose to drink port, and when it came he asked, with a timidity in strong contrast with the old buoyant self-confidence I remembered in him, if he might have a biscuit with it, lest, drinking on an empty stomach, the wine should get into his head. The waiter brought him four biscuits

on a plate, and in a breath he had wolfed two of them. He had broken the third, and was putting half of it into his mouth, when he seemed to bethink himself, glanced round furtively and put the unbroken biscuit and the fragments of the broken one carefully into his breast pocket, saying with a pitiable air of affected carelessness: "I've just remembered how fond my little boy is of this particular kind of biscuit, and he doesn't get many. We're not very well off." And he gulped down a mouthful of the port.

I stopped short in my favorite disquisition on the continuity of the English climate, and said: "Look here, my good chap, what's happened? Has your father lost his money, or what?"

"He's dead—and he—he left all his money to a woman he married just before he died," he said jerkily.

"Tell me," I said, with a good deal of sympathy in my voice.

"We quarrelled about my marriage—three years ago. I married a poor girl, an orphan, and he wanted me to marry a rich one, or at any rate a girl of good family. But he made me an allowance, and we lived on it all right. Then he married a widow who lived near him, and neither I nor my wife could get on with her at all. We and she grew to hate one another, as he very well knew. Soon afterwards he died, poor old chap,

and left his money so that she has the use of it during her life, and when she dies it comes to me. I think he meant well, poor old chap; as far as I can make out he fancied that our being dependent on her money would somehow bring us together. But the devilish old beast collared the seven thousand a year, and allows me twenty pounds a year out of it—twenty pounds a year! And I have my wife and little boy to keep." He choked a little, and gulped down some more port.

"It's very hard luck. You must be hard up!" I said compassionately.

"Hard up?" he said in a kind of rasp. "We are hard up! You know how I was brought up—to have the spending of seven thousand a year. I can do nothing—nothing! I can't write even a good enough letter to be a clerk, and I've no arithmetic. I got two jobs, both at twenty-five shillings a week, and lost both because I couldn't do the work. I could—I could strangle myself for being such a fool! It isn't so much on my own account I feel it—it's—it's the boy!"

He caught up his glass, gulped at the wine and choked and spluttered over it. I saw but for it he would have sobbed.

"I'm very sorry to hear this," I said. "Let me help you a bit to go on with, and I'll see if I can find you something in the way of a job."

I pulled out my sovereign case, turned four

sovereigns out of it on to the table and pushed them across to him.

I never saw such a curious look on a human face. It was half unbelieving joy, half absolute terror. He put out his hand and touched them with the tips of trembling fingers. Then he scrabbled them into his palm, jumped up and muttered hoarsely, "I must get home! They're hungry at home—hungry!" And he ran out of the bar.

"The old address!" I shouted after him, but I doubted that he heard me.

CHAPTER XII

WE GET ON THE TRACK OF MRS. JUBB

I DRANK up my sherry and bitters and went back to the Temple. My mind was full of the plight of poor Jubb, or rather of the plight of his wife and child, and I told Angel about him.

When I had done, I saw that there were tears in her eyes, and she said: "What a horrible woman his stepmother must be! A hateful creature!"

"Well, I've been thinking that we ought to try to help these wretched poor people somehow. Between the four of us we ought to be able to do something."

"Help them! Of course we must! If we don't remove that horrible woman, I don't see the use of our being the General Philanthropic Removal Company. This is the best chance the Company has had."

"Of course it is," I said. "And it had never struck me. We must see Chelubai and Bottiger about this at once."

We went out and dined simply at the Cheshire Cheese. After dinner Chelubai and Bottiger

came round to play bridge, and we told them of the plight of the unfortunate Jubb. They were a little disappointing; they did not rise to that height of passionate indignation we expected.

Bottiger said: "Of course we must make up a purse for them, and see if we can't find the husband a job."

"Yes, I should think we can work it," said Chelubai. "Of course every kind action in this life helps to give you a better physique and better health in your next incarnation."

"We must do more than that," said Angel, with decision. "We must remove his horrible stepmother. That's what the G. P. R. C. is for."

Chelubai's face fell, and he said doubtfully: "I've never given my mind to the matter of removing a woman. I've never sized it up as coming within the sphere of the Company's operations. It goes rather against the grain."

"Now, in the name of Fortune, why?" I said. "Surely women can be just as objectionable as men, as potent for harm, as hampering to the progress of the human race!"

"Women are the elevating force in society," said Chelubai, with simple, manly faith.

"Oh, get out!" I cried in disgust. "Do not be such a blind sentimentalist!"

"They uplift us," said Chelubai, with an air inconceivably rapt and foolish.

"Now, how has this horrible Jubb woman uplifted any one?" I said, with some irritation.

Chelubai was checked. He hesitated and said: "Well, perhaps she hasn't. But still the notion of removing her is repugnant to me. To remove a woman is not a chivalrous act."

"The lesser virtues must give place to the greater—chivalry to philanthropy," I said firmly.

"That's what I think," Bottiger broke in. "And I suppose Jubb would subscribe handsomely to the hospital."

This touch of practical philanthropy cleared the air, and in a breath Chelubai's face changed from that of a transcendentalist to that of a brainy American.

"I should think that adversity has cured Jubb of that false sentimentality which has in so many cases proved a stumbling-block in our path," said I.

"But couldn't we just for once remove this horrible woman without any subscription?" said Angel. "I'm sure we oughtn't to waste time bothering about that."

"Yes," said Chelubai, with a fine earnestness. "This is our chance for a removal on pure romantic lines."

"You are extraordinary people," I said, with some impatience. "Why on earth should we lose

the chance of conferring a double benefit on Humanity? This is shocking sentimentality."

"I was thinking of the time it would take to make the arrangement. We ought to remove her at once," said Angel.

"Any haste would be very injudicious," I said. "We shall have plenty of time to arrange about the contribution to the hospital while we are arranging the method of removal."

"There's another aspect to the matter," said Chelubai thoughtfully. "Philanthropy's a splendid thing. Theosophy teaches it, because it gives you a better physique in your next incarnation. But indiscriminate charity has its dangers all the same; it weakens the recipient. We ought to allow Mr. Jubb to subscribe; he will be a stronger man for it."

"After all, if he's going to get seven thousand a year out of it, he can well afford to subscribe, and he ought to," said Bottiger, with practical, English good sense.

"Yes, and we must remember that he has proved himself rather a weakling," I said slowly. "It will be strengthening to his character to let him have a share in our philanthropic enterprise, to have a little of his stepmother's blood on his hands."

"I suppose it would," said Angel.

"But, all the same, I should have liked to do

it on pure romantic lines," said Chelubai sadly.

"I shouldn't," said Bottiger.

"That's settled then," I said. "I'm nearly sure to see him in the course of the next few days. He will come round to thank me. I'll sound him; and, as I say, I really think I shan't find in him that gross sentimentality which has so hampered our human efforts to benefit Humanity in the case of other heirs."

"It's not very likely. There's no gross sentimentality in a man who has gone under," said Chelubai grimly.

Marmaduke Jubb came sooner than I expected, for about eleven next morning there came a knock at the door. Angel made her usual bolt for her room, and our housekeeper ushered him in.

We shook hands, and I saw that his face, though still pinched, lacked something of the gauntness of yesterday.

"You must forgive my rushing away without thanking you last night," he began. "But I didn't know what I was doing. The money seemed too good to be true, and it took me by surprise."

"I understood, my good chap," I said. "And I don't want any thanks. I was only too glad to be of use."

"But I must thank you!" he cried. "You don't know what you did for us. We couldn't have gone on any longer—we absolutely couldn't!

We should have gone to the river if I'd come back last night without any food or money."

"I'm sorry to hear it was as bad as that," I said.

"We couldn't have stood the boy's crying for food any longer. He's quite different to-day. He actually wanted to play—the little beggar." And he tried to laugh, but failed dismally.

"Sit down and tell me more about it," I said. "But you'd like a drink, wouldn't you?"

"No, thank you. I never drink in the morning."

I was pleased to find that his troubles had not driven him to that refuge.

It was a long, unhappy tale he told me of the painful struggle to get poorly paid work, and of losing it when he got it; of sinking through stage after stage of poverty to the bitterest want. I gathered that now and again, for weeks at a time, he and his wife had gone short of food, and at last the child had gone short, too. The memory of their sufferings stirred him at times to a kind of furious anguish.

When at last he came to the end of his tale, I said thoughtfully:

"I wonder you weren't driven to do away with your horrible stepmother. Your wife and child would have had the money, and with seven thousand a year all the world would have been eager

to make excuses for their unfortunate kinship with a murderer. It might even have secretly applauded the deed which gave them so respectable an income."

He jumped from his chair, crying: "I never thought of it! It never occurred to me! I am a thick-headed fool! To think of drowning the boy, when there was that way out of the difficulty!"

This was the temper I wanted.

"The worst of it is, I don't see how you are to prevent yourself falling into the same straits again," I said slowly. "I'm going to do my best, but I may not be able to get you work."

"At any rate, you've shown me how to prevent my wife and the boy falling into them," he said, very seriously.

I looked at him carefully, and saw that he meant it; that to save his wife and child from want he would remove that horrible old woman himself. It seemed to me a quite natural and proper temper.

"It would be a pity to hang for the good lady," I said thoughtfully. "And there is always the danger of smirching your son's name. Yet if she stands between your child and life you will have to. A child can't endure privation for long."

"I'll clear her out of the way, and joyfully," he said.

"I shouldn't blame you. But I fancy there's another way."

"Another way? What?" he snapped out.

"Get some one else to clear her out of the way for you."

"By Jove, if I only could!" he said, under his breath.

"It's merely a matter of money. How much would you give to be put in the possession of your seven thousand a year?"

"Fifty thousand pounds," he said.

I laughed, and said: "You are in a prodigal humor. But to accept your offer would be taking an unfair advantage of your necessity. Will you give five thousand?"

"Yes!" he shouted.

I laughed again at his eagerness, and said: "Well, I think that for that sum she could be removed."

"Done!" he cried. "Should you do it yourself? I don't want it done gently. Let her die painfully."

I have always heard that an infuriated sheep is worse than a savage dog; and the once so gentle Marmaduke seemed no exception to the rule.

"I certainly shan't do it myself; and I can't undertake that it shall be done painfully," I said gravely.

"Well, as long as it's done somehow, I suppose I ought to be content; but I should have liked it painful," he said, with grumbling vindictiveness.

I had been right. There was no gross sentimentality about Marmaduke.

"I don't say for a moment that it will be murder; all that is to be done is to put you into possession of seven thousand a year. But of course the firm which does this kind of work is not particular how it secures its results, and it might be murder. It's a serious matter. Is your mind quite made up?"

"Quite made up?" he said firmly. "And, what's more, if you work it for me I shall consider myself under the deepest obligation to you."

"Oh, it's not much trouble to me," I said. "You had better give me a document agreeing to pay me £5,000 whenever you come into your seven thousand a year in consideration of a loan of £4,000, which I need scarcely say I do not really lend you now."

His face fell, and he said: "I'm afraid I can't do that, for there is a clause in my father's will by which I forfeit my inheritance if I anticipate any part of it by post-obits, or anything of that kind."

"The deuce there is! I was wondering how it was you hadn't kept out of want by raising

money on your expectations, or rather certainty. Well, well, it will be enough if you give me note of hand for £5,000. But, of course, you would have to trust me to earn it."

His face cleared again, and he said cheerfully: "That's all right. I know if you didn't clear the old fiend out of the way you'd never ask for the money. You shall have a note of hand at once."

"That's settled then. And now for your immediate needs. We must consider them, for, as you can understand, prompt as this firm is, these removals cannot be arranged in a day. How much a week can you live on comfortably?"

"Thirty shillings," he said, without a thought.

I thought of his former gay cravats and their jewelled pins.

"I'll make it more than that. We'll say two pounds ten."

"Thank you," he said, really thankfully.

"And how would you like to go out of London for a while, till after this removal has taken place? I can borrow a cottage in Hertfordshire for you. It's not quite the time of year for the country, but the change should be good for your little boy."

"We should like it," he said, and his face shone at the thought. "It would be good for the boy and my wife, too. Besides, London is a kind of nightmare to us, though the old hole does not look so bad as it did yesterday."

"Very good then. If you will bring your family to lunch here to-morrow, I will have it arranged by then; and you can go down by the four o'clock train."

I gave him a five-pound note to fit out himself and his family for the country, and had to turn him out to cut short his thanks.

When I told Angel of my arrangements she said that she had to go out shopping; and soon after her return a pretty, warm child's coat and hat and a warm woman's cloak was delivered. In the afternoon I saw Chelubai and Bottiger, and told them that I had arranged the business. Bottiger was ready enough to lend the cottage, for if he wished to go down for a day's shooting it was large enough to hold him and the Jubbs. In his praiseworthy joy at the prospect of fresh philanthropic work, he wrote out a long list of provisions to be despatched to the cottage by Shoolbred; and Chelubai swelled the order with two dozen of port and a box of cigars.

On the morrow Marmaduke brought his wife and child to lunch. Mrs. Jubb was a quiet, good-looking creature, older than her years by reason of the privation she had endured, but I thought that the return to ease would soon wear away the marks it had left on her, and restore her to her proper youth. The little boy's eyes seemed too large for his peaked face. He was a silent

and subdued child, and Angel's untiring efforts to make him laugh were fruitless; she could only now and again draw a grave smile from him. At the sight of lunch his face filled with an anguished eagerness very painful to see. However, he ate nicely, and did not wolf his food, as he might very well have done. He did enjoy it; Angel had ransacked Spiers and Pond for dainties likely to tempt a child's palate. At lunch he absorbed every one's interest; his father and mother could not keep their eyes off him; and I saw that they were very anxious eyes. Angel had neither eyes nor ears for any one else, and I began to think that I must really find some children to play with her. After lunch she brought out of her room a large red wooden engine, and he played with it in a hushed delight.

As we had arranged, Angel then took away Mrs. Jubb to her room for a talk; and I made the needful inquiries about the habits of the wicked stepmother. Marmaduke told me that she lived at Hardstone Manor in Hampshire, once the country seat of the Scroome family, bought by his father some twenty years ago. Save for her servants, whom she bullied, she enjoyed no human intercourse, for she had been at the pains of quarrelling with all her neighbors, the rector, the doctor, the Anglo-Indians and the small gentry. She had no relations, or she had quarrelled with them

also; at any rate, he had never seen any of them, or heard her or his father speak of them. Discounting Marmaduke's natural bitterness, she was plainly a horrible creature—she was gluttonous, she often drank too much, she was empurpled and obese. There could not be the slightest doubt that common humanity demanded her instant removal.

I learned, too, that she never stirred out of the manor house into the grounds—some six acres of garden and shrubberies—without a pack of half a dozen yapping small dogs. The village boasted a really comfortable inn, kept by a retired butler who had been for many years in Marmaduke's father's service. It would make admirable headquarters for any one reconnoitring the ground for the operations of the G. P. R. C.

At the last moment it occurred to me that this might prove the proper occasion to use my suffocating machine; and I asked Marmaduke if he had any of his stepmother's letters. Fortunately, he had half a dozen of them, and then and there took them from the little trunk which held the scanty clothes of his family.

Angel and Mrs. Jubb came back to us, for it was time to be starting to Euston. I fancied that they had both been crying over the tale of her late privations. We drove with them to the station; I took their tickets; we put them in their

carriage and hurried away to escape their thanks.

Having seen them off, we drove to Chelubai's rooms, where Bottiger also awaited us, and held a meeting of the G. P. R. C. to deliberate upon our plan of operations. Chelubai was the first to suggest that the time had come to try my noose-bag; and then I laid before them my plan for giving the removal the appearance of suicide. I suggested that we should make use of Angel's skill in drawing, that she should work away at the letters of Marmaduke's stepmother until she could imitate her handwriting. Then we should write a letter giving that good lady's reasons for committing suicide, to be left upon the scene of her removal. When she had written the letter, Angel should go down to Hardstone, and, using her easel as a stalking-horse, observe Mrs. Jubb's habits, especially the hours and places in which she walked abroad, and the best spots to lie in wait for her. Then two of us would make a descent in the motor-car and accomplish her removal.

They were all of them pleased with my plan, and Angel fell in with it with great eagerness. She had acquired during her talk with Marmaduke's wife an even greater detestation of Marmaduke's stepmother than she was already cherishing. She was so eager, indeed, that as soon as our deliberations ended nothing would content

her but an immediate visit to the Army and Navy Stores, where we bought a packet of notepaper very like that on which the letters to Marmaduke had been written.

CHAPTER XIII

SCAMPED WORK

Mrs. Jubb's handwriting was difficult to imitate for its very formlessness. Angel worked steadily away at it hour after hour for three days with a resolute patience infinitely creditable. At the end of the second day her imitations were very fair, and I was of the opinion that they were quite good enough, since it would be only natural to allow for the shakiness induced by suicidal emotion. But she was not content; she worked at it for another day; and then none of us could tell a letter of Mrs. Jubb from her copy of it.

I had been pondering the letter which that good lady would write were she going to commit suicide, and I had made up my mind that nothing short of madness would induce so selfish a creature to put an end to her worthless self. Therefore I composed the following letter:

I am sick of this life, for the voices tell me that the plots of my enemies will soon be successful. I cannot fight against them any more, for they are devils and there is no killing them, or I should

have starved Marmaduke and his wife long ago. He is a devil and so is she. All my enemies are devils, including the vicar, and they are always plotting—they think I do not know it, but they will find themselves mistaken, for the voices tell me all their plots. They say it is necessary for me or them to die. What I want is rest, rest for the weary, and I shall find it in the grave; the voices say so, and they know.

HENRIETTA A. JUBB.

It seemed to us that the letter in Mrs. Jubb's handwriting and an empty phial smelling of chloroform by her side would satisfy even the most suspicious that the good lady had committed suicide.

Our preparations having been made, next morning Angel travelled down to Hardstone in the character of a lady artist, and took with her a bicycle and an easel. It was hardly the time of year for painting landscape, but, as I pointed out, we really could not take the responsibility of the seasons, and it was not possible for all artists to paint their winter scenes from their studio windows. By the first post I had a letter from her saying that she was comfortably settled at the Rose and Crown; and next day a fuller letter, describing the Manor-house grounds, enclosing a map of the country and showing the lane which

ran between the common and the side of the grounds most suitable to philanthropic enterprise. The lane ran from the main road through a wood—that side of the common was wooded—and there was excellent cover right up to the hedge of the Manor-house grounds.

In the letter of the fourth day she said that she had seen Mrs. Jubb, "a loathsome, bloated creature," and she was walking, accompanied by a pack of small dogs, along a path through a shrubbery of deodoras and Wellingtonias which would afford half a dozen good hiding-places from which to spring out upon her. Angel advised us to use bicycles and not a motor-car; for motor-cars had not, curiously enough, yet become common objects by the wayside in that part of the country, and would arrest attention.

In the letters of the fifth and sixth days she said that she had again seen Mrs. Jubb, and on both occasions walking along the same path. This information seemed very good, and we made ready to travel down to Hardstone and set about the business directly Angel summoned us. Bottiger procured from his brilliant but drunken doctor an anæsthetic which took effect quicker than plain chloroform. But when it came to drawing lots for the anæsthetist, Chelubai would not let me draw, and Bottiger backed him up, on the ground that as the holder of Marmaduke Jubb's note of

hand for £5,000 I must not appear in the business. I resisted to the degree proper to the occasion; but they had reason on their side, and I yielded when I had made the show of reluctance decency demanded. When Fortune chose Chelubai to manipulate the noose-bag, he was positively overjoyed. "I feel that I have again a chance to retrieve my character after the Pudleigh fiasco," he said.

Two days later came the summons from Angel. She had ascertained that Mrs. Jubb was a woman of the most regular habits, that she always passed through the suitable shrubbery between twelve and a quarter past every fine day. She suggested that the Company should, following the guidance of the map, meet her on the common at eleven the next morning and explore thoroughly the ground.

Accordingly, that afternoon, Chelubai and Bottiger took the train for Winchester, which they were to make their headquarters, equipped with their bicycles, the noose-bag, the anæsthetic and the suicide's letter. As I bade them good-by, I impressed upon them the danger of going near Angel, once she had shown them the ground, either before or after the operation; for I had no intention of letting her be mixed up in the business, if anything went wrong. They agreed, with some glumness, that I was right.

I was beginning to miss Angel sorely. I missed her in the morning, and came to breakfast the less cheerful for that she would not be there. I was always looking up from my writing, or the studying of briefs, to say something to her, and remembering with a sigh, often after I had begun the sentence, that she was not there. Time and again I caught myself listening for her footfall. I went about my work and my pleasure in a half-hearted way. As luck would have it, on the morrow of the setting out of Chelubai and Bottiger, the weather broke, and it rained and rained. The waiting for her return grew wearier and wearier. I had letters telling me that Chelubai and Bottiger had met her at the appointed place, and under her guidance explored thoroughly the ground she had chosen for the operation. Chelubai seemed exceedingly pleased with it. In her letter Angel dwelt at a comforting length on her disappointment on finding only Chelubai and Bottiger at the meeting-place. Her eagerness to be back at the Temple gave me a singular pleasure, and I was tempted to write and bid her return, but the G. P. R. C. had resolved that she should stay on at Hardstone for at least a week after the removal of Mrs. Jubb to watch how things went, and I would not act against its resolution.

For five days it rained, and not till the sixth

morning did I awake to find it fine. I was, indeed, delighted by the change; not so much because Mrs. Jubb would be removed, but because the fine weather brought Angel's return nearer. I was very impatient all day, and in the evening I called at Chelubai's rooms to learn if he had returned. He had not, nor had his man received a wire from him. The next morning I received a letter from him saying that they had waited for half an hour for Mrs. Jubb, but, owing doubtless to the dampness of the grounds after the rain, she had not come. They hoped for better luck on the morrow.

It was another day of impatience for me, but in the middle of my dressing for dinner Chelubai and Bottiger came triumphant.

"It's all right!" cried Chelubai joyfully. "We brought it off at once."

"Good!" I said. "Let's hear all about it."

"As I told you in my letters, we explored the ground carefully with your sister," said Chelubai. "Yesterday we hid our bicycles amongst the trees on the common, put on our masks and laid in wait for Mrs. Jubb in the shrubbery, but she never came. To-day we did the same, and soon after we heard a clock strike twelve she came down the path with half a dozen little curs."

"Seven," said Bottiger. "I kept counting them."

"Seven, was it?" said Chelubai. "Well, I poured the anæsthetic into the noose-bag——"

"That anæsthetic has a most unpleasant smell," interrupted Bottiger.

"So you've told me forty times!" said Chelubai, with what seemed to me needless heat, since it was a harmless, natural remark. "Well, I stepped out behind her," he went on. "One of the curs snapped at my legs; she turned round, saw us masked, and was just firing off a yell when I popped the noose-bag over her head, jerked the wires tight and held on. Bottiger was patting the dogs and speaking kindly to them to keep them quiet. The anæsthetic was splendid; it——"

"It has a most unpleasant smell. I don't know when I came across a more unpleasant smell," Bottiger interrupted. "I don't think it can be healthy."

"Look here!" cried Chelubai. "You'd better get that smell off your mind once and for all! Say all you want to say about it—all—every word! Then I'll go on with my story."

"It's off my nose I want to get it," said Bottiger, with a pathetic smile. "Go on. I'll tell Roger about it later."

"I'll lay my life you will!" said Chelubai furiously. "I've heard nothing else since we left Hardstone! Well, she was very quickly unconscious, and we carried her in among the trees and laid her down."

"She took some carrying, too. She was a lump," said Bottiger.

"She was," said Chelubai. "Then we smoothed out her dress to make it look as if she'd lain down comfortably, and waited a good five minutes to let the anæsthetic work properly."

"It was a five minutes! The smell of that anæsthetic—" said Bottiger, and checked himself.

Chelubai scowled at him, and went on: "Then I took the noose-bag off and saw her face. I felt no doubt whatever that I should acquire no bad harm whatever from the removal. I saw that the Planetary Logos wanted that woman removed. It was only fair to Humanity. It was very satisfactory, and set my mind quite at rest."

"She did look a wrong 'un," said Bottiger.

"Then I took a gold pin out of her shirt-waist —I mean blouse—and pinned the suicide letter to the tree-trunk above her head," said Chelubai.

"Her own gold pin was a very happy touch— very convincing," I said, with warm approval.

"We left the bottle which had held the anæsthetic by her side, and put her handkerchief over her face. Then we made sure that the coast was clear, pressed out a footprint or two, got back to our bicycles and rode to Winchester."

"Good! An excellent piece of work," said I.

"But something must really be done about the

smell of that anæsthetic," said Bottiger earnestly. "It's awful—a kind of disgusting sickliness. I can't really describe to you how awful it is. The next time we get a bottle, you must smell it for yourself, Roger."

"I will not!" I said firmly.

"Let's go and dine somewhere. Perhaps food will stop his mouth," said Chelubai wearily. "I've had hours of this kind of thing. That anæsthetic has got into his brain."

Bottiger suggested the Carlton, and, when we agreed, he said we would walk to it. I wondered at this, for like most athletes Bottiger will never walk when he can ride. Soon I learned the reason. We came to a chemist's shop, and in he went. We waited, and presently he came out disconsolate.

"It's no good; he can't cure it," he said in a tone of despair.

"Cure what?" said I.

"The smell in my nose," said Bottiger.

"Oh, come on!" said Chelubai harshly.

At the next chemist Bottiger stopped us again. He came out shaking his head ruefully. At the next chemist we revolted. We took a hansom and drove off, bidding him come to the Carlton at his leisure. He came to us three-quarters of an hour later, still unsatisfied and unhappy. I have never seen anything make so deep an impression

on Bottiger as did the smell of that anæsthetic. He talked of nothing else, ransacking creation to tell us what it smelt like and what it did not smell like. He was positively morbid on the subject, and turned a dinner which should have been the cheerful celebration of a splendid piece of work into a funeral monologue.

The next morning I awoke at the postman's knock, and found a letter from Angel in the letter-box. What was my disgust to read that Chelubai and Bottiger had failed! Mrs. Jubb had recovered, and staggered back to the Manor-house with a tale of how two masked men had tried to asphyxiate her, and rendered her unconscious; how she had recovered slowly, and at last been able to totter back to the house. The doctor had been sent for, then the local police, then the chief of the Winchester police. The country was being scoured in search of her assailants. I made haste to dress, and in the middle of my dressing the paper came. I stopped dressing to search its columns, and soon found the following paragraph:

Strange Outrage on a Hampshire Lady

A strange affair is reported by our Winchester correspondent. Yesterday Mrs. Jubb, of the Manor-house, Hardstone, the widow of Mr. Henry Jubb, of Ne Plus Ultra Pickle fame, was taking

a walk through her grounds when two men in masks sprang out upon her, and forcing a bag containing some anæsthetic over her head, endeavored to asphyxiate her. She became unconscious, but it is to be presumed that something frightened away her assailants before they had accomplished their fell purpose. Mrs. Jubb recovered so far as to be able to walk to the house, where she lies in a critical condition suffering from the shock. The unfortunate lady had only a glimpse of her two assailants, and cannot give an accurate description of them. But the police have a clue. The motive of the crime is buried in mystery, for Mrs. Jubb's purse and jewelry were untouched. The police are making every effort to discover them, and Detective Inspector Bramick of Scotland Yard has gone down to investigate the matter. Further developments are expected immediately.

For my part, I truly expected further developments immediately, nor was I mistaken. I was but half-way through my breakfast when Chelubai came in, looking the most miserable of men. He shut the door carefully behind him, sank limply into a chair, and said in a voice full of tears: "Well, I'm a most unfortunate creature. There seems to be a fate against me. I have made an utter mess of it."

"It certainly was an unfortunate failure," I said. "But I don't see any utter mess. There is no chance of your being connected with the affair."

"But to have failed like that! When I had the thing done, absolutely done! I shall never forgive myself, never! The Company will never have a more perfectly arranged operation, and to mull it like that!"

I was hardly in the mood to contradict his well-deserved self-reproach. I only said, "How do you suppose it happened?"

"I've been trying to think it out. It may have been that there wasn't enough of the anæsthetic; or it may have been that the stuff of the bag let the air through. I can't make up my mind."

"Did you keep the bag on long enough?"

"Sure; five or six minutes."

"You timed it, I suppose?"

"No; I judged it."

"Then that was how you went wrong. I'd bet three to one, if there was any way of settling the matter, that you didn't keep the bag on two minutes. You never allowed for the way the minutes dragged while you were waiting in anxious excitement."

Chelubai's face fell even more miserable. "That makes it worse than ever. I shall never

forgive myself—never! I bungled it through rank carelessness."

His despair touched me, and I said: "Cheer up, there's nothing to be gained by fretting over it. We tried to perform a noble action, and the fact that we failed does not make it any less creditable to us to have attempted it."

Chelubai shook his head. "I don't take any stock in failures," he said. "Success is the thing."

"Oh, Chelubai, Chelubai!" I cried. "You have now been a friend of mine for five years, and even still in moments of deep emotion I hear from you echoes of the base sentiment of the tradesman! It is far better to have failed nobly than to make an ignoble success."

"We don't look at in that way in the States. Success is success," he said heavily.

I was impatient of him, but I saw that his feelings were too deeply lacerated by the failure of his philanthropic enterprise for him to be susceptible to the finer emotions at the moment. If he had succeeded in asphyxiating the good lady, the base sentiment of the tradesman would have found no place in him. I said no more.

"What I feel is," he went on, "if you'd been there, with all that time on your hands, you'd never have left the place till you'd make sure that we'd outed her."

"Yes, a classical education has its advantages," I said. "But, after all, Bottiger, who was at school and at Oxford with me, was there."

"Ah, but he hasn't made the most of his advantages, like you. Besides, there's Celtic blood in him, I'm sure there is. He's too impulsive. You should have heard him swear at the smell of the anæsthetic after he had finished speaking kindly to the dogs."

"It seems to have been somewhat unnecessary."

"And there's that unfortunate young Jubb and his wife and child robbed, absolutely robbed, by my bungling!"

"I'm afraid poor Marmaduke will be bitterly disappointed to learn that his abominable stepmother is still alive. But, after all, he has acquired a right to sit for the rest of his life on the doorstep of the Company. And Angel and I will look after him. We'll find him work; he's our *protégé*."

"No, no!" cried Chelubai. "I'm responsible for that unfortunate family. I bungled their chance of a happy affluence. I adopt them."

"Well, you can settle that with Angel."

I went on peacefully with my breakfast to the accompaniment of the sighs and plaints of the griefstricken Chelubai. I had just finished when

Mrs. Plimsoll brought in a telegram. It was from Angel, and ran:

Weather bad; cannot paint; returning Waterloo 12.1.

A thrill of pleasure at the thought of seeing her so soon set me veritably quivering. Then I could have wished that she had stayed at Hardstone a little longer to watch the march of events. I did not tell Chelubai that she was returning that morning; I wanted to have her all to myself.

Presently Bottiger came in, and I saw at once that he, too, was overcome by sorrow at their failure to remove Mrs. Jubb.

However, he said, with a very fair affectation of brave indifference: "So we didn't kill the old beast after all." And then he added, with a sudden change to a very natural resentment, "And I made myself devilishly uncomfortable all for nothing! The smell of that rotten anæsthetic is in my nose still!"

"Confound the anæsthetic!" I said, with some heat. I had heard enough of it.

"She seemed dead enough, too. How did she recover?" he said; and then he added, with a cold determination, "When are we to have another go at her?"

"Never!" I cried, stirred to my inmost depths by the absurd suggestion. "For evermore Mrs. Jubb is sacrosant to us. She would be on her

guard. Every one about her would be on their guard. As far as we are concerned she will live out her allotted natural span."

"You wouldn't have us own ourselves beaten," said Bottiger, with a deep disgust.

"It's a fine honest English principle never to know when you're beaten," I said, "and far be it from me to disparage it. And if you are burning to die a martyr to principle, you go and remove Mrs. Jubb by yourself."

"And I think it's only fair that you should leave the £5,000 we ought to have got for it by her removal to the Children's Hospital," said Chelubai.

"That suggests to me to observe that you must not expect the G. P. R. C. to pay for your defence out of its working capital, for it won't be a transaction of the company," said I.

"Do you think she's as risky as that?" said Bottiger.

"She's as safe, from us, as houses," said I.

"She's impossible," said Chelubai.

"Then we have made a mull of it," said Bottiger. "I thought that you might have had a shot, Roger."

"And deprive Humanity of my future services? No," I said firmly.

They were both exceedingly mournful, and discussed methods of getting more philanthropic

work in a half-hearted way, showing very little hopefulness.

Chelubai summed up the chances when he said: "Fortune never forgives. All our failures come from my having mulled the Pudleigh removal."

At half-past eleven I turned them out, and bade them keep away from the Temple until we were quite sure that they were out of the wood—to my mind they were far too quick in taking it for granted—for it would never do to risk any chance of Angel's being connected with the assault on the abominable Mrs. Jubb.

I thought it well not to meet her at the station; and the rest of the morning dragged unconscionably. At last, at half-past twelve, she came, flushed and smiling, her eyes radiant with delight.

"I came back so soon," she cried, "because I couldn't stay away any longer! I couldn't, really!"

"I'm awfully glad to have you back," I said. "I've missed you horribly."

"I'm glad to hear that," she said, and putting down her easel she came into the sitting-room, gazed round it with contented eyes, walked across it, and pulled the curtains straight.

"I feel that this is my home—even more my home than my old home with my people. Isn't it a strange feeling?"

"A very proper one," I said.

She sat down in her easy chair, and looked about her.

"How's Mrs. Henrietta Jubb? Have the police found a clue?" I said, with some anxiety.

"No; and they're not trying to, or I shouldn't have come back. When Inspector Bramick saw the suicide's letter and the empty chloroform bottle, and examined the shrubbery and found no trace of a struggle, nor even a footprint, he was very doubtful. But when Mrs. Jubb declared that one of the masked men was the Vicar—it seems she hates the Vicar—he made up his mind that it was all an hallucination, that she had never been attacked at all. He told me all about it, for he was staying at the 'Rose and Crown,' and I talked to him a good deal. He said that she was as mad as a hatter, and tried to kill herself. Then when she didn't succeed, she trumped up the story of the masked men in case any one should have seen her when she was insensible, and read the letter."

"But how did he get over her leaving the letter in the shrubbery?"

"He says that the chloroform made her stupid, and she forgot all about it."

A very reasonable supposition."

"Now every one in Hardstone says that she is mad, and oughtn't to be at large. They have ever so many instances of her being mad which they

didn't notice at the time; and all her servants have given notice."

"Well, then we've not failed utterly. We've brought down retribution on her head. But—but—why, hang it all! The game's in our hands! We can pull the business out of the fire yet!" And I sprang up from my chair.

"How?" said Angel, and her eyes opened wide.

"I'll do it first, and tell you afterwards!" And I made for the door.

"What a shame!" cried Angel.

But I seized my hat, and bolted down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV

I TRY MY HAND ON MRS. JUBB

I HURRIED to Fleet Street Post Office, and wired to Marmaduke:

"Come at once. Catch next train. Bring clothes. Will meet you at Euston."

Then I went back to my rooms and packed a kit-bag. By the time I had done lunch was ready, a carefully chosen lunch to celebrate the return of Angel; and all through it she teased me to tell her what I had in mind. But I assured her that she had much better wait for an agreeable surprise. She did her best to hide her disappointment at my leaving her, and never said a word to keep me back, but she sighed now and again and she begged me not to be long away.

I took a hansom to Euston to meet Marmaduke's train, and she went with me. To my great content, he had caught it. I put Angel into a hansom, and bade her good-by. Then I and Marmaduke drove to Waterloo.

He was looking another man, a man not only stouter, but of more spirit. But it was somewhat sadly that he told me that he had seen in the

papers how the firm to whom I had entrusted the business had failed in their attempt to remove his abominable stepmother.

"I hope," he said timidly, "that you did not take a hand in it yourself."

"I?" I cried. "Good heavens, my dear chap, I'm a respectable and rising young barrister! I couldn't do such things! Why, I haven't been out of London!"

"I'm very pleased to hear that," he said quickly. "I was afraid you might be in danger."

I was touched by his thought for me.

"I'm in no danger," I said. "But what do you mean by the attempt having failed?"

"Hasn't it?" he said, brightening. "This morning's paper said she had recovered."

"That's true enough. But every one in Hardstone believes that she attempted her own life and is suffering from suicidal and homicidal mania. A bottle of chloroform, or rather an empty bottle which had held chloroform, and a letter in her own handwriting declaring her intention of committing suicide, were found near the spot on which she alleges she was assaulted. Moreover, she asserts that one of the masked men who assaulted her was the Vicar of Hardstone."

"Old Toombes? What nonsense!"

"Exactly. The whole story of the assault is nonsense. But all her neighbors are living in ut-

ter dread of her, and from that dread you are going to relieve them. You are going down to Hardstone to put her into a lunatic asylum."

Marmaduke gasped.

"I undertook to clear her out of your path, not to have her murdered—to give you control of your seven thousand a year. And I'm going to carry out my undertaking."

"It's wonderful—wonderful!" said Marmaduke.

His face was bright with cheerful hope, and making suggestion after suggestion, he showed himself eager indeed to play the chief part in carrying out my scheme.

We caught the train at Waterloo, and all the journey we discussed our plan of action. I was pleased to find that the doctor and the family lawyer were as friendly to Marmaduke as they were hostile to his stepmother, for we were to a great extent in their hands. I was delighted, too, with the spirit he showed; necessity had indeed stiffened him. But I did not like his linen. His clothes, knickerbockered as he was, would serve very well, but his linen and cravat were weak. However, we had the compartment to ourselves; he soon changed into a shirt collar and cravat of mine, and looked once more a prosperous young man.

At Winchester we broke our journey, and went

to the office of Mr. Brodrick, the Jubb family lawyer.

As soon as we gave him our names, the clerk said: "Mr. Brodrick has been wiring all day to try and find your address, Mr. Jubb. I'll take you straight to him."

As we entered his room, Mr. Brodrick, a well-preserved man of sixty, started up from his chair, saying: "My dear Mr. Marmaduke, this is indeed a relief! I've been trying to get into communication with you all day."

"I thought I'd better come straight to you, Mr. Brodrick, as soon as I heard how matters were. I'm living in Hertfordshire, or I should have been here sooner. I'm afraid it's a sad business," said Marmaduke.

"We must act, Mr. Marmaduke; we must act at once, before anything worse happens," said Mr. Brodrick, falling into his natural tone of pompous solemnity.

"I felt that something must be done, and I came to you to learn what was to be done. Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Brand, a barrister of the Inner Temple," said Marmaduke.

Mr. Brodrick shook hands with me.

"I did not like to come down alone under these distressing circumstances," Marmaduke went on, "and Mr. Brand kindly came with me. Now what can I do? Is there anything I can do?"

"There is only one thing to do, and that is to put your unfortunate stepmother under restraint," said Mr. Brodrick firmly.

"I shall be guided entirely by your advice," said Marmaduke. "But are you sure she is really insane? Mayn't this be a mere passing aberration?"

"I have a letter here, sent me by Detective Inspector Bramick of Scotland Yard, and found near the scene of the alleged assault on your stepmother, which settles that matter beyond question. Read it; you will recognize the handwriting," said the lawyer solemnly; and he took from his pocket-book the suicide's letter, which had cost poor Angel three days' hard work.

Marmaduke read it, shook his head and said: "Very sad—very sad! How am I to set about the business?"

"I propose that we catch the next train to Hardstone, and discuss the matter with Dr. Beach to-night. It is late, of course, but there is no time to lose," said Mr. Brodrick. "And I shall not feel justified in leaving the place till every possible step has been taken to avert the danger which threatens the inhabitants."

He spoke as though a horde of Bashi-bazouks was about to be let loose on that peaceful village.

"I feel bound to help you in every possible way," said Marmaduke, in a tone of veritable

solemnity; and I saw that he, too, was deeply impressed by the gravity of the affair.

We had some tea with Mr. Brodrick, and caught the train to Hardstone. We went to the "Rose and Crown" to engage rooms and order dinner, and our welcome at that old-time inn surpassed my most sanguine expectations. We were hailed as deliverers from an imminent peril; and Mrs. Chivers, the wife of the landlord, shed tears as she said: "You can't think, Mr. Marmaduke, what a relief it is to see you and Mr. Brodrick. The suspense 'as been that orful, we none of us knew but what we might be murdered in our beds! She might break out at any moment!"

Apparently they had convinced themselves that Mrs. Jubb might waddle down and decimate the village with a hatchet.

"It's very shocking, Mrs. Chivers. We are going to take measures at once," said Marmaduke.

He went off with Mr. Brodrick to confer with Dr. Beach, and while they were gone I talked with the landlord and Mrs. Chivers. He had been butler and she parlor-maid in the service of Marmaduke's father. They were full to bubbling over of Mrs. Jubb's insanity, and they gave me the opinions of every one, of the police, the vicar, the doctor and the village on the matter. Every one had the opinion I could have wished. I learned,

too, that three of the maids had already fled from the Manor-house to the village, and that each of them remembered at least a score of occasions on which Mrs. Jubb had acted like a mad woman. They were in the full flood of their talk when Marmaduke and Mr. Brodrick returned. They had found Dr. Beach out, but had left a note for him, begging him to come to us as soon as he returned.

We had a private sitting-room, and sat in it while our dinner was being cooked. Talk languished; for that peculiarly human sense of being the hub of the universe was very strong on Mr. Brodrick at the moment, and he sat in a portentous silence looking, or at any rate trying to look, a man of extraordinary power and ability dealing with the crisis of a century.

Dinner was a relief, and we had scarcely begun when Dr. Beach was announced. He was the very type of the old-time, country doctor, wearing the very air of a man whose chief reliance was on calomel and again calomel. Marmaduke invited him to join us, and he joined us with an appetite. Little was said of the business which had brought us together during the meal; at the end of it, on my suggestion, Marmaduke ordered a bottle of port, and when we had closed round it, the lawyer asked the doctor his opinion of Mrs. Jubb.

Dr. Beach shook his head solemnly, and said:

"Dementia—acute dementia, I fear." And forthwith he plunged into an account of her symptoms, and of how he had for some time observed the insidious advance of the disease, and looked round in vain for some responsible person to inform of what was impending. He ended by saying, "This morning the poor lady called me a doddering old idiot."

He was the very doctor we wanted; and our murmur of sympathy was not untinged with the proper amazement.

Then Marmaduke made a point I had impressed on him. "This is very serious," he said solemnly, "very serious. The worst of it is, I don't know anything about her relations. I never heard of her having any."

"No more has any one else," said the doctor. "Have you, Brodrick?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"Is there any immediate danger?" I said. "Perhaps it would be better for Jubb to wait a few days on the chance of some relation turning up."

"The danger is immediate!" cried the doctor. "She has just had an acute attack of suicidal mania! To-morrow it may be homicidal!"

"It's very serious, indeed," said Marmaduke. "What steps do you propose I should take?"

"There can be no doubt about what you should

do. She should be put under proper restraint at once," said the doctor.

"Certainly," said the lawyer.

"But am I the proper person? It's throwing a great responsibility on me," said Marmaduke anxiously.

"A great responsibility," said I.

"You're the only person to take the necessary steps. If she has any relations, we can't afford to wait till they turn up, or we can find them," said the doctor.

"Yes; you must act, Mr. Marmaduke," said the lawyer.

"Well, gentlemen, I place myself unreservedly in your hands," said Marmaduke. "I shall follow your advice implicitly. What is to be done?"

The lawyer rubbed his hands, the doctor smiled and said: "I shall send word to Dr. Sharpe—he's the best man in Winchester—to-night, and ask him to come with me and visit her to-morrow morning. We shall sign the certificate, and you will only have to send it to the Medical Superintendent of the County Asylum, and he will send for her."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't like that at all," said Marmaduke quickly. "I should prefer a good private asylum, where she will be as comfortable as possible. Of course, before she married my father she did not enjoy decent comfort, much less

luxury. Still, that is what I should prefer."

"Well, after the way she's treated you, I must say that your thoughtfulness does you credit," said Mr. Brodrick, with warm approval.

"In that case," said Dr. Beach, "I will write to my old friend Mr. Glazebrook, at Barkley. His is an excellent asylum; and she would be as comfortable there as anywhere I know. What did you think of paying him?"

"Eight hundred a year," said Marmaduke.

"That's very handsome—very handsome. I must say you don't bear malice. I'll write to him at once, and he'll have a carriage and attendants here before Sharpe has gone," said the doctor.

"Well, that's settled then. But if I get into trouble through taking this responsibility I shall expect you to stand by me, since I am acting on your advice," said Marmaduke.

"We'll see you through, my boy! We'll see you through! But there won't be any trouble," they said, with one voice.

We filled our glasses, and ordered another bottle of port. Then the lawyer said: "With regard to the property: if you would like to leave the arrangements in my hands——"

"Of course! Of course!" said Marmaduke.

"Then I think I can arrange that you take out letters of administration and practically take the

property over," said the lawyer; and he looked at me to see if I would suggest any obstacle to that course of action.

I suggested no obstacle. But I fancied that in the necessary documents there would be no insistence whatever on the fact that Marmaduke was Mrs. Jubb's stepson—indeed, to the cursory official reader of them it would probably appear that he was her son. However, this was one of those mysteries of the legal profession with which the Bar has nothing to do, unless they are presented to its notice in a brief, and I said nothing. Who was I to prevent Marmaduke from enjoying at least three years' affluence? And I could hardly expect Dr. Glazebrook to discover Mrs. Jubb's sanity earlier—if then—since the human intellect has hardly reached that high pitch of acuteness which enables it to make discoveries which cost its possessor £800 a year. Indeed, such a sum would probably persuade him to take the most favorable view of her case—most favorable, that is, from our point of view—for many years, and I could hardly believe the abominable old creature to be saner than the average woman. When I came to think of it, she was probably madder than an average hatter.

Everything having been settled, the doctor and the lawyer helped us drink the second bottle of port with a very good will, and then the doctor

took his leave, and we went to bed. The next morning Marmaduke and I had nothing to do, since the doctor was doing everything for us, but we did not leave the inn, that we might be on hand to have the earliest news of what happened. About eleven we saw the Winchester doctor drive through the village, and ten minutes later he and Dr. Beach drove back through it on their way to the Manor-house. Soon after they had gone the closed carriage from the lunatic asylum came through the village to Dr. Beach's house, and returned from there to the "Rose and Crown," where it waited. Marmaduke grew fidgety, as was not unnatural; Mr. Brodrick read the morning paper with the quiet content of a man for whose holiday some one else is paying. At last the two doctors came, and were shown up to our sitting-room.

Their eyes were very bright, and their faces were still red. I gathered that they had not had a pleasant time with the lady of the Manor. Dr. Beach took up the tale, and he told us that, to use his own unprofessional phrase, Mrs. Jubb had given them a devil of a time. It seemed that she had only that morning recovered the full use of her temper after Chelubai and Bottiger's painful but fruitless attempt to remove her, and she had whetted it on them as the first convenient objects. She had taunted them with their pro-

fession, their lack of skill in it and the fulness of the graveyards in their neighborhoods. From their profession she had moved to the even more personal matter of their years, and the little use they had made of them. They had tried to turn her gibes lightly aside; but the more they humored her, the more furious she grew, till at last she had foamed at the mouth as she heaped on their devoted heads the choicest flowers of a rich vocabulary.

"She was obscene, gentlemen! I assure you, obscene!" Dr. Sharpe broke in. "I have never come across a more obvious case of acute dementia in the whole course of my professional experience—never! It is, doubtless, the result of drinking. I learn that she has been a confirmed soaker for years."

If they were satisfied, I am sure that Marmaduke and I were. I began to grow assured, indeed, in the face of the confidence of these experts, that we had done the community a service in drawing the attention of its guardians to a dangerous member and withdrawing her from its midst. At any rate, I saw the certificate signed with a serene mind—it is sad to be consigned to a lunatic asylum, but in this case inhumanity was its own reward. After all, she would live many years longer than if she had been left at large;

and her character would benefit greatly by the discipline.

Then followed a discussion as to who should be present at Mrs. Jubb's removal. Marmaduke, in a spirit of not unnatural vindictiveness, was for going himself; but I dissuaded him. It seemed to me that Mr. Brodrick and Dr. Beach were the men to oversee that process; their presence would give an official sanction to it. They fell in with this view. The asylum carriage set off briskly for the Manor-house, and the doctor drove Mr. Brodrick in his carriage after it. Half an hour later Marmaduke and I strolled up to the Manor-house. At the bottom of the drive we met the asylum carriage coming away, and I caught a glimpse of the great, purple, bloated face through the window. It was not a sight to inspire me with any feeling that we were not acting for the best.

Mr. Brodrick and Dr. Beach were expecting us, and they made haste to tell us of the removal of the lady of the Manor. It seemed to have been a scene of unsurpassed verbal violence, but the skill of the attendants had prevented any unseemly struggle. I think that the doctor and lawyer had both been well fortified to bear it with equanimity—perhaps even with restrained cheerfulness—by their exceeding dislike of the good lady. We lunched, and lunched very well, since

the cook had not fled, in Marmaduke's ancestral, or rather paternal, home; and for my part, I ate and drank in the peaceful and contented spirit of the successful philanthropist.

CHAPTER XV

AN INVASION

Mr. Brodrick left us early in the afternoon. Before he went he assured Marmaduke that he would make all haste to get on with the business of putting him in control of his father's property. Last thing of all, as he was in the hall pulling on his gloves, he said in a half-hearted way that perhaps we might as well look through Mrs. Jubb's papers, and make sure that she had no relation who had a better right to manage her affairs than her stepson. Here was a responsibility which suited me; and I insisted on relieving Marmaduke of the task. It was very much to my interest that justice should be done; I was by no means assured that some absurd scruple might not prevent Marmaduke from doing justice to himself, and it was likely that if he crushed such a scruple as it deserved, he would yet be uncomfortable. Whereas I was quite resolved that no relation of the abominable lady of the Manor should oust him from the rightful control of his father's money, and bring him back into the painful straits from which he had lately emerged, if I could help it.

I was not however called upon to give play to my sense of justice; there were no letters from an uncalled-for relation to be destroyed. The good lady's papers were for the most part bills, and receipted; her only interesting papers were five acknowledgments from the secretary of the Dog's home of five several subscriptions of a hundred guineas.

These I took to Marmaduke, and he was deeply moved by this unexpected evidence of his step-mother's kindly heart; the tears stood in his eyes as he cried,

"Hang her! Hang the old beast! While the boy was starving, she was chucking my father's money to the dogs!"

I soon restored him to cheerfulness by telling him of the fruitlessness of my search for a relation.

The next day his wife and the boy joined him, and leaving them the undisputed masters of Hardstone Manor, I came back to town in time for dinner. Angel was the more pleased to see me that she did not look for so early a return. When I suggested to her that we should gather up Chelubai and Bottiger and all dine together at the Savoy in celebration of my success, her face fell, and she said, "It would be very nice—but—but I think I should like a quiet evening with you better. We haven't been together for so long."

I was willing enough to let her have her way; we dined at the Savoy, lingered over our dinner, and came home. The evening passed quickly enough, for we had the lost talks of a dozen evenings to make up for. Mrs. Jubb alone afforded food for hours of talk. Angel was of the opinion that that good lady would have been luckier if Chelubai and Bottiger had kept her head in the noose-bag for another three minutes; but I could truly assure her that she would soon be happy enough, happier by far than she deserved, in a comfortable lunatic asylum; and she agreed with me that she was unlikely to be saner than the rest of the world. It was nearly one o'clock when we said good-night and went to bed.

It was indeed delightful to come to breakfast next morning and find Angel making the tea.

After breakfast I went to Chelubai's rooms, and found Bottiger breakfasting with him, both of them very gloomy.

They brightened a little at the sight of me; and Chelubai said reproachfully, "We've been wondering if we were ever going to see you again."

"I've been busy," I said.

"It seems as if we'd somehow or other shut ourselves off from the human race by that confounded job," said Bottiger sulkily.

"Oh, I'm not the human race," I protested modestly. "There's some in the streets: I've just seen them."

Bottiger frowned, and Chelubai said, "We're grown so used to going about together and seeing you nearly every day that we miss you somehow or other; and it has disarranged things."

"I am stimulating, I know. But you needn't make me out such a very exacting kind of alcohol," I said. But I was pretty sure that their exclusion from the society of Angel had disarranged things, to use Chelubai's phrase, far more than the loss of mine.

"Hang Mrs. Jubb!" said Bottiger.

"That's hardly the way to talk of a lady who might have hanged you," I said coldly. "But I must admit that she is not an attractive sight."

"What? Have you seen her?" said Chelubai.

"My dear chap, I didn't want to see her: I had heard too much of her appearance. But it's hard to remove a person of her size without seeing something of her."

Chelubai rose, set both hands on the table, and stood staring at me. "You've removed Mrs. Jubb?" he said.

"I have, indeed," I said. "I have removed her to the lunatic asylum of a Dr. Glazebrook, at Barkley, where I trust that she will spend many peaceful years removed from all possibility of those alcoholic excesses which I understand were undermining her constitution. I left Marmaduke

Jubb in his rightful place, and prepared to make the best of it."

"And—and—is he going to pay his subscription to your Hospital?" said Bottiger.

"Of course."

Chelubai advanced on me with outstretched hand and cried "Put it there! What resourcefulness! What splendid resourcefulness!"

"Resourcefulness be damned!" I said with, I think, pardonable irritation. "You didn't think I was going to have the trouble of composing that admirable suicide's letter wasted by any reluctance on the part of a middle-aged and almost illiterate woman to succumb to an anæsthetic!"

"I had not reflected how it must rankle," said Chelubai in a contrite voice. "But I see how it must have weighed upon a fine literary spirit like yours."

I had brought it on myself.

"You *have* wiped our eyes," said Bottiger softly.

I told them the story of my visit to Hardstone, and when I had done they congratulated me. Then Bottiger said with a sigh, "Well, I shall go about feeling more comfortable. I shan't shy at every policeman I see any longer."

"We can resume our old life," said Chelubai.

We did resume it. Christmas was upon us; and that joyous season is not suited to advanced Phil-

anthropy; it seemed no time for sounding heirs in whom it would naturally excite a violent access of their usual false sentimentality. We spent it merrily, as do the wise who allow no chance for mirth to be thrown away. Chelubai did not follow his usual custom of retiring to a Folkestone hotel and sulking it out in a passion of superiority; Bottiger did not go off as usual to a country house. I fancied that Angel caused this change in their habits, and I wondered at them. We took advantage of the dulness of business at this time of the year to buy two thousand Quorley Granite Company shares, and it forced up the price. Mrs. Marmaduke Jubb sent Angel a beautiful set of furs; Marmaduke sent me what I can only call a palatial dressing-bag; Honest John Driver sent Chelubai a case of champagne by way of a Christmas remembrance, and the gift assured us that he must be intending to make a call upon our philanthropic services before long.

At the beginning of the New Year I had a letter enclosing a check for £5,000 from Marmaduke Jubb, his subscription to the Children's Hospital. He said that Mr. Brodrick had managed the business of putting him in control of his father's property without a hitch. He had found £11,000 lying idle at the Bank, and he proposed to spend the bulk of the income on increasing and improving the estate so that, should his stepmother recover,

he would yet in the end be many thousand pounds the richer for her lapse from sanity. Also, against that emergency, he had settled the £6,000 left in the bank after he had paid the Company, on his wife, and was going to settle another £4,000 on her, so that whatever happened, it would never be in his stepmother's power to reduce them again to such painful straits. In returning his note of hand I praised his forethought, and expressed my pleasure at having been of service to a man of his sound sense.

About this time Morton contrived to make the acquaintance of the secretary of the Quorley Granite Company, a young man of the name of Pleever, one of the clerks of Albert Amsted Pudleigh. He found that he was the secretary of five other of the companies of that financier, and that for the discharge of these many duties he received the trivial pay of £150 a year. Morton condoled with him on the smallness of his pay, and was very soon in a position to sap his half-hearted allegiance to his employer when the time came for us to jump the company.

Our home life was running as pleasantly as life can, when about the end of January a vexatious mishap befell. One afternoon Angel and I were having our tea when we heard a knock at the outer door. Since Mrs. Plimsoll had instructions never to admit anyone but Chelubai and Bottiger

without asking them to wait while she inquired whether I was too busy to see them, so that Angel could escape to her room, if need be, Angel sat still. Of a sudden we heard a voice outside the sitting-room door saying, "Oh, it's all right. However busy Mr. Brand was, he would see me;" the door opened, and in came Miss Dorothy Delamere, late of the Pyramid Theatre, whom I believed to be at the moment touring in America, and whom I certainly wished no nearer.

"Hullo, Roger, old boy! Aren't you surprised—" she cried, and stopped short at the sight of Angel.

I was indeed surprised, and even more vexed. We had been on the friendliest terms, Dolly and I, for she was the prettiest creature; but her eight months absence in America had abated my once impassioned interest in her; and, to be sadly frank, now that I had Angel's interests to consider, it was very much a matter of,

"O, we that were dear, we are all too near
With the thick of the world between us!"

And it was indeed distressing that the thick of the world was in no such handy position.

But I trust that nothing of this feeling showed in the warmth with which I cried, "What, you, Miss Delamere? This is a surprise! Let me intro-

duce you to my sister. Angel, this is Miss Delamere, an old friend of mine."

The two girls bowed to one another with as little effusion as can be got into a polite greeting. I drew forward a chair for Dolly, called to Mrs. Plimsoll to bring another cup and saucer, and set strenuously about my favorite disquisition on the continuity of the English Climate.

It soon became clear enough that there was something of a strain upon the social relations, though far be it from me to suggest that there was anything of the household cat to whom the new cat is presented in the attitude of both girls. But I would not see the strain; I was firmly blind to the fact that their contributions to the conversation were monosyllables of the warmth of ice. Heartiness is as a rule foreign to my manner; but for once I was hearty to the very verge of bluffness. It was no use; either was glum, and stayed glum. Presently my vein of light and cheerful talk was, as the miners say, petering out, and I was coming to my wits' end. Just before I reached it, I had a happy thought; I knew that Dolly had one subject, herself, and that she was above all things fond of discussing that self in relation to what she called her art, and I said, "How did you get on in America? That's what I'm longing to hear."

"Very well, thank you," said Dolly coldly.

"Which town did you like best? Where did

you find the most sympathetic audience? New York, now? ''

'' Oh, at New York I had a great success, both at the beginning and end of the tour,'' said Dolly, and in a breath all her natural vivacity returned, and she plunged into the tale of her triumphs. I had but to sit back in my chair, enjoy my cigarette, burnish up my American geography, and at intervals fling to her the name of a city. She had played but a small part in the adaptation of that popular romance '' The Temporal City,'' yet as her brisk narration took its course, as we journeyed with her from New York to Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Buffalo, Denver, San Francisco, New Orleans and other great cities of America, as the tale of Press notices, admirers, bouquets and suppers grew, the impression was slowly but deeply stamped on our minds that she, and she alone, had borne the whole burden of that weighty entertainment, to her alone was due its enormous, vulgar success.

I could see that Angel was bored; and I, too, was bored, but reconciled to my boredom by the knowledge that the time was passing without an outburst of open hostility which would have endangered our secret. But at last, for all that she had taken many lessons in voice production, I saw with no little disquiet that Dolly's breath was running out, and I was casting about for some device to

give fresh power to her tongue wagging, when the clock in the library tower struck six.

"Good gracious! Is that the time?" cried Dolly, springing up. "I've got to get home and dress and dine at the Criterion at seven. I'm going to the St. James's."

"Saved! Saved!" I murmured under my breath, and cried anxiously, "You'll never do it!"

"I shall! I must!" she cried, and shook hands hastily with Angel.

"I'll put you in a cab," I said, and went with her.

She began the attack before we were down the first flight of stairs.

"So this is how you keep your fine promises!" she said. "This is how you never look at another woman, is it? And live on the memory of me."

Plainly she remembered, with that painful accuracy in matters of sentiment which is the womanly gift, my many impassioned protestations at our parting, when I had been truly sorry to lose her, and I could have wished that they had been fewer and less impassioned, for I foresaw that after the lapse of eight months I should have great difficulty in reconstructing my tender mood.

However, I said gently, "Well, I didn't mean you to understand that I was going to play the hermit and deny myself all intercourse with my own family. My words didn't apply to relations."

"A pretty relation!" said Dolly.

"Well, you can't expect a brother to find his sister particularly pretty when such a dazzling creature as you is before his eyes. But people do say that Angel is pretty," said I.

"Brother!" cried Dolly. "You don't expect me to believe that that little chit is your sister."

"What do you mean?" said I with a fine sternness.

"Well, you told me once that you hadn't got a sister, and that your mother had died when you were a baby, and that it was a pity you had never known a woman's refining influence, for you would have had a nicer disposition."

Oh, the folly of confidence! I certainly had wailed that wail in an expansive moment, and now my expansiveness had found me out.

"Oh, then," I said carelessly. "Then Angel was in the hands of her guardian and hadn't come to live with me."

Dolly went down six steps in silence considering that information, then she said with some distrust: "That sounds all right—but—but you're so clever—one never knows. Yet, after all, you're hardly the man to carry on with a little chit like that."

"Thank you," I said. "But when all is said and done, if Angel weren't my sister, you're hardly the person to talk about carrying on. What about Springer-Sykes?"

Springer-Sykes was a safe card to play; he was manager of "The Temporal City," and it was to him that Dolly owed her part in that solid production.

"That's too bad!" cried Dolly hotly. "I never carried on with Bill! Besides, Bill's business! You know a girl can't get on in the Profession nowadays without being civil to people like Bill. It's the only way of getting your chance!"

"And a very nice way, too," I said in my nastiest voice.

"Oh, you are hateful!" said Dolly, and she stamped her foot. "You know as well as I do that I hate the great vulgar brute!"

I did not know it: indeed I believed that between Dolly and Mr. Springer-Sykes there was much in common. But I had got her on her defence and I proposed to keep her on it.

"And you wrote me two letters from the States, and then not a single word," I said bitterly.

"And how could I? Rushing about from place to place like that!"

"Easily, if you'd wanted to. The fact is," I said still more bitterly, "you forgot all about me. What with your Bill and your Americans you never gave me a single thought."

"I did! I thought about you often. But, look here, you agreed to take me as I was. I told you my artistic temperament would not let me do the conventional things. I have to consider my Art."

"That's all very well; but I don't see why you should attack me the moment you come back."

"Who wouldn't?" said Dolly. "I come back believing all you said about never forgetting me, and I find you having tea with another girl."

"You should have given me notice, and I would have broken it to you gently that I had my sister staying with me."

"If you're going to be sarcastic!" said Dolly angrily. "But, there, I didn't come to quarrel with you."

"I should hope not," I said; and a glance round the King's Walk Bench assuring me that few people were about, I caught hold of her and kissed her.

I heard a soft little sigh breathe out of her; but for my part I was discomfited by the discovery that I did not draw from the kiss the pleasure I deserved.

"I must hurry up," she said in a far more gracious tone. "When will you come and see me? For it's no good my coming to see you with—your sister making a third. I'm living in a flat, 79 Northampton Mansions, with another girl."

"I'll come and fetch you out to dinner on Thursday, about seven, if you'll come."

"I should like to, awfully," she said.

We came out into Fleet Street; I put her in a cab and went back to Angel.

CHAPTER XVI

I AM CALLED UPON TO PLAY THE OFFICIAL BROTHER

When I came back to the Temple I found Angel leaning forward in her chair with her hands stretched out to the fire and staring into it.

I pulled up my chair to the other side of the fire, sat down, and said cheerfully: "If once Miss Delamere gets started, there's no end to it. I think she has as abundant a flow of talk as anyone I know."

"Yes," said Angel.

"I hope it didn't bore you to extinction."

"No," said Angel.

"It is wearisome when people whose doings are matter for the theatrical chit-chat column tell you them with such a wealth of detail."

"Yes," said Angel.

"However, to such a pretty creature most things are forgiven."

"Yes," said Angel.

It seemed to me that she was taking but a lifeless part in the conversation, and as a rule she was so ready to discuss with the liveliest interest any new acquaintance we chanced to make.

"Are you feeling out of sorts?" I said with a sudden concern.

"No," said Angel.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," said Angel.

I looked at her carefully; but there was as little expression in her face as I have ever seen in it. Then she rose, and went quietly to her room.

I lighted a cigarette, and had nearly smoked it, when the explanation of her lack of interest in our visitor broke upon my mind: sisters always, or nearly always, disapprove of their brother's friends. I was somewhat vexed; it was the first womanly invasion of my freedom of which she had ever been guilty. However I dismissed the matter as a piece of inevitable girlishness; and presently I went to her door, and called to her that it was time she was dressing to go out and dine at the Cheshire Cheese. At dinner she seemed to have lost her wonted spirits; she talked little and listlessly; and again I asked her if she were feeling out of sorts. She said that she was not. But when we returned to the Temple after dinner, she said she was going to bed, and went. As I drove down to the club to play Bridge, I wondered if she could by any chance be sulking. Truly, she had not looked sulky once, and I had believed that form of temper to be foreign to her nature. But I wondered.

When I came to breakfast next morning, I suffered a shock of surprise very near horror: Angel's hair no longer hung down her back in the thick plait. It was done up, arranged about her head in the fashion of the hour.

I sank into my chair in a dismay I could not hide, crying "Good heavens! Have you been playing at that famous beanstalk? Have you grown up in the night?"

Angel blushed and frowned and sighed: "I—I—I am grown up," she stammered. "I shall be seventeen next month."

"But why—why didn't you give me some warning? Why didn't you do it a little at a time? It is too much to change from girlhood to womanhood in a night!"

"Yes: I do look like a woman—a grown woman—don't I?" she said; and her eyes were shining with pleasure.

"As if it were a matter for pride!" I said. "But there—it's my fault, I ought to have told you I didn't approve of grown women."

"I've only seen you with one—Miss Delamere yesterday—and you approved of her—quite," she said sedately.

"A mere concession to the demands of hospitality."

"Oh, no," said Angel with assurance.

"Besides, I'm used to her."

"Well, you will—" she said, and stopped short.

I fell upon my breakfast with no little irritation: the necessity of the readjustment of ideas, even when it breaks slowly and gently on the mind, is sufficiently tiresome; when it is suddenly thrust upon it with regard to a matter of prime importance, it is painful. It was to be no small readjustment, as I learned at once, for all through breakfast I had to look and look again at her, observing and weighing the change, getting my eyes used to it. To bind up the hair, or leave it hanging down seems a small enough matter; but in her case it had made a beautiful woman of a charming child. It had, too, strengthened her face in a way; it seemed to have given a greater breadth to her brow, and her candid eyes had a more steadfast look in them. I had to adapt myself to this change; and I had a dim prevision that it was going to modify our brotherly and sisterly relation. I resented it; for I was content with things as they were.

The change came surely enough, but slowly. I began to lose my brotherly frankness, to treat her with more deference. I think, now, that there was some springing to life of the essential basic antagonism between the man and the woman. Beside the change in our attitude to one another, there were changes in her, too; she began to spend more money, much more money, on her dress; and she

was assuredly justified of her lavishness. But I could not understand the fits of restlessness or listless brooding from which she suffered now and again. Sometimes, too, I caught her regarding me with a questioning, searching look, and again I was puzzled. Also she showed a new curiosity and unexpected interest about my movements, and the carelessness of her indirect questions did not blind me to the real strength of her desire to know.

On the Thursday after her descent upon us I took Dolly Delamere out to dinner. I perceived with regret from the questions she asked about Angel that my assurance had not set her mind at rest about our relationship, that she was still haunted by a suspicion that we were not brother and sister. I was grieved by this stubborn incredulity.

As far as I could make out the suspicion recurred at regular intervals of half an hour; and once she said, "If I thought you were humbugging me, I'd never forgive you. I'd pay you out and that little chit, too."

I did not doubt her; and I knew dear Fortune too well to believe that she would not sooner or later be given the chance. I said with enthusiasm, "Would I dream of humbugging you?"

"You'd better not," she said with distressing firmness; and I made up my mind that I had certainly better not be found out in that enterprise.



Before I could ask, she turned and went down the stairs.—Page 298

Later in the evening she said with kindly frankness, "I've often thought if my Art allowed me to marry, you are the man I would marry. But it is impossible."

Before we went to America we had seriously discussed that matter. Now, to my surprise, I found myself heartily thanking my stars that her Art was of this exacting nature: so great a change does a separation of eight months work in a naturally faithful heart.

However I said sadly. "It seems pretty hard on me."

"I don't know," she said, looking at me with doubtful eyes. "You're very clever, but you're a queer creature. As likely as not you'd expect your wife to be a regular old-fashioned, domesticated frump. Why—why I believe you're Philistine enough at heart to expect her to sacrifice her Art to her children."

"I should certainly expect them to come first," I said firmly.

"I thought so," said Dolly with faint contempt.

She seemed ready to let the discussion drop, and I let her drop it.

The next morning I observed for the first time Angel's new curiosity about my movements. She did not ask me outright; that would have been too much to expect from any woman, even from her. But she learned after I had whetted her curiosity

a little more that I had taken Dolly out to dinner, and I saw that the knowledge gave her no pleasure. I resolved another time to leave her curiosity ungratified, though I could not for the life of me see that she could have any reasonable objection to my entertaining an old friend.

Now if the binding up of Angel's hair had made a change in our intercourse, it had made a far greater change in the attitude of Chelubai and Bottiger to her. I saw them growing her infatuated slaves; and I saw her beginning to learn her power and use it. It was interesting to observe, but it gave me little pleasure; precocity is always tiresome. I am bound to say that she used it but little, more in the fashion of one making idle experiments than in any other way. She seemed ever careless of it. Yet I was vexed: I had grown used to a charming unspoilt child, and I did not want a beautiful woman, conscious and probably vain of her power. I began to see with an extreme regret that the home life which I had found so pleasant was breaking up.

I was therefore more irritated than surprised when one afternoon Chelubai sought me out in the library of the Warrickshire where I was reading alone, and with a serious air, and speaking hurriedly and in some confusion, said: "There's a thing I've been wanting to talk to you about. It isn't considered necessary in the States, and I be-

lieve it is only considered necessary in the best circles in England. But I like to do the correct thing." And he stopped and seemed to seek for words.

"Drive on, sonny," I said, speaking American to help him. "It sounds as if it were something unpleasant. But don't mind me."

"Oh, no; it isn't," he said quickly. "But as she's under age, I thought—I thought I would ask your permission to pay my addresses to your sister."

I ought to have known what was coming; but as it was I was taken somewhat aback. "Good heavens," I cried. "Pay your addresses to Angel. Why, she's a mere child! She—she's only just done her hair up." And for the moment I was filled with an extreme hostility to Chelubai.

"She's nearly seventeen," said Chelubai. "And I believe that the marriageable age as fixed by British law is a good deal less than that."

It *was* a fact to put forward! I stared at him, my mind working with inconceivable swiftness to find some reason which would put an end to the business for good and all.

Chelubai did not wait for me to find it, he went on, "It isn't only that I admire her immensely. But I have a feeling, in fact it's an absolute conviction that her destiny and mine have been linked together in previous existences. You know that we

hold that a man meets the same woman again and again in different existences and always in some close relationship. Of course the relationship may differ. In one existence she may love him, in another he may love her, and in another they may love one another. Sometimes they are married, and sometimes they are not. Sometimes they bring one another happiness, sometimes unhappiness. I have made up my mind that your sister is the woman with whom my destiny is linked in this way."

"I'm afraid it's impossible," I said slowly.

"Impossible!" cried Chelubai. "But I assure you that the fact has been demonstrated: I have it on the best authority—from three of the most advanced theosophists of the Western inner circle."

"I don't mean your theory of interlinked destinies, which is probably enough," I said, "but impossible for me to consent to your paying your addresses to Angel."

"But why?" said Chelubai; and his face fell.

"Well, you are an excellent fellow, as no one knows better than I. But after all, you know, I can't very well consent to a philanthropic murderer paying his addresses to my sister, can I?"

"B-b-but," stammered Chelubai, to whom this point of view had plainly never suggested itself, "she's a philanthropist, too—she's one of us."

"Yes, I know she is, and I'm not at all sure that

it's really good for her. But of course it's a very different matter with her. She's so much younger than we are. The pursuits of the young do not as a rule impart any lasting bent to the character. It is only a passing phase in her development."

"But I've never heard her make any objection to our removing people—rather the other way. I've always thought she was devoted to furthering the progress of the human race," said Chelubai.

"Of course she is. She has a good heart."

Chelubai thought for a minute; then he said, with almost poignant regret, "Well, I suppose I could quit philanthropy."

"That would make no difference," I said quickly.

"No difference?"

"Certainly not. You have been a murderer on strictly philanthropic lines."

"But as a matter of fact I've never murdered anyone," said Chelubai, brightening.

"No, but it's the principle—the principle I look at. Besides, with decent luck you will yet succeed in one of our philanthropic enterprises. Am I justified in trusting a young girl's happiness to the keeping of a murderer, even though he has been actuated by pure altruism?"

"You know me well enough to know that I should make her happiness my first consideration!" cried Chelubai.

"I know you would. But do look at the matter fairly. You are, after all, with all your altruism, a wealthy capitalist. Angel, if she had married you, would be a capitalist's wife. Sooner or later the capitalist temper is bound to assert itself, and what now appears to you the noblest philanthropy will appear merely criminal. In the ordinary course of married life you would have your little quarrels, and you'd forever be twitting one another with your respective murders. Would that make for connubial bliss, I ask you?"

"I think it's devilish hard that a man's philanthropic endeavor should be dragged into matters of sentiment," said Chelubai. "What's it got to do with them anyway?"

"They can't be separated; they can't, really," I said earnestly. "I look upon the practical philanthropist as a natural celibate. I could not consent to his paying his addresses to my sister."

"Then you refuse me your consent?" said Chelubai curtly.

"I do; and I'm sorry to do it, but I cannot overlook your unsuitable profession," I said with tempered firmness.

I saw that he was deeply hurt and about to break out bitterly upon me; but he checked himself, reflecting doubtless that I had right upon my side, and also that he would lose all chance of attaining his end if he resented my firmness to the point of

quarrelling with me. "It's very hard," he said, "and I'm not sure that it's conscientiously friendly to let a little matter like this stand between me and my hopes of happiness."

"You see I'm unhappily placed between friendship and my sister's welfare."

Chelubai nodded: "But I don't see how you're going to get married yourself; you're in just the same position as I."

"Pardon me; nothing short of hanging can prevent me marrying anyone I want, for it's only being hanged that will stamp me as a practical philanthropist."

"You English are so unconscientious," said Chelubai reproachfully. Then his face cleared, and he went on more cheerfully: "But, after all, your sister won't always need your consent. She'll be of age and able to marry as she likes."

"That's true enough," I said. "And I can assure you that I shall be very glad to be free of the responsibility."

CHAPTER XVII

MORE PROPOSALS

I OUGHT to have looked back on my having refused Chelubai's request merely with a sense of pleasure at having done a disagreeable thing neatly and without quarrelling with him. But my feelings about it puzzled me; I found myself full of a smouldering resentment against him for being in love with Angel; I felt it almost outrageous and certainly absurd, since she was only a child. I was still in my bewilderment when Bottiger must needs be outrageous and absurd too. One day he inveigled me into lunching alone with him on the pretext that he wished to consult me on a matter of business. I went expecting, like the innocent I am, that it was some matter of money; I wondered at the care and thought he must have expended on the lunch, and I wondered to find him plainly uncomfortable, for no reason that I could see, during the earlier part of it. When we had finished, and settled pleasantly down to our cigars and liqueurs, he said in a shamefaced way, " It's about your sister I want to talk to you."

" About Angel? " I said sharply, shaken out of

the amiability induced in me by the lunch, for I guessed what was coming.

"Yes—the fact is—I mean you must have noticed—I'm sure I've made no attempt to hide it, have I?" he said incoherently, and looked at me with an absolute frankness.

"I'm sure I can't say till you tell me what it is you haven't hidden," I said with a repellant air which should have warned him to change the subject.

"Why, that I admire her," he blundered on.

"Everyone with eyes in his head does that, everyone of taste—at least I should hope so," I said suavely.

"Yes, yes; of course. But I don't mean like that. I mean seriously."

"Well, I suppose everyone admires her seriously. Admiration isn't a joke of any kind as far as I know," I said coldly, resolved to give him no help at all.

"Oh, how dense you are!" he said irritably, wriggling in his chair. "I mean I want to marry her."

"Well?"

"Well, I thought you might give me a helping hand—you might give her a hint of how I feel about her. I shouldn't like to take her by surprise."

It seemed to me best to nip this business in the

bud, and I said severely, "The whole thing is out of the question."

"Out of the question? Why?" he cried.

"She's a child. She's only just done her hair up."

"She's nearly seventeen; and both my grandmother and great-grandmother were married before they were seventeen."

"Really, you can't expect an advanced socialist like myself to go to the extreme of countenancing the gross malpractices of our grandmothers. It was very wrong of them."

"It is old-fashioned, I know, but I don't see any harm in it, and if you like, I'll wait."

"I don't like," I said harshly. "I don't think you're at all the kind of man for Angel to marry."

"Why not?" he said flushing angrily.

"In the first place your profession of practical philanthropist is not the profession one approves of in the husband of one's sister."

"It's the same as yours!"

"Mine has nothing to do with the matter. I'm not the man who wants to marry. If I did, I should retire from philanthropy and run no risk of leaving my wife a disgraced widow."

"Well, I'll retire," he growled.

"Just so. But you have put your hand to the plough and I could not dream of being responsible for your letting go of it. Besides, there is another

even more serious objection to my encouraging your suit."

"What's that?" he said sharply.

"Your habit of always doubling spades at Bridge."

"What on earth has that got to do with my marrying?" he cried.

"It is a damning proof of an ill-balanced, reckless nature. When I ask myself am I justified in entrusting my sister's future to a man who always doubles spades at Bridge, my conscience assures me that it is out of the question."

"I'm sure I should always do my best to give her a good time and make her happy—and—and that sort of thing," said Bottiger.

"No man who always doubles spades——"

"Damn spades!" said Bottiger savagely.

"By all means," I said suavely. "But that brings me to the question of your temper. When you fly out like this at a man who is trying to save you from ruin by eradicating an evil habit——"

Bottiger slammed down his fist on the table and cried: "I didn't ask you for your consent, and I don't care a hang for it! I asked you for your help, and I call it deucedly unfriendly to refuse it! The fact is you're just a dog in the manger; you can't marry your sister yourself, and you won't let anyone else!"

"If I can help it, she shall never marry a man who always doubles spades——"

"One of these days you won't have a say in the matter! She'll be of age, and able to marry anyone she likes!" said Bottiger thickly.

"That's quite another matter," I said calmly. "Then I shall be quit of all responsibility. But I think, I honestly think, that she is growing a sound enough player to have learned by that time the folly of marrying a man who always doubles spades at Bridge."

Bottiger's next words, and they were not a few, were a handsome tribute to my powers of shelving an unwelcome subject. They dealt entirely with my own character, and we parted in some coldness at the restaurant door. But I observed that the next time we played Bridge, he did not always double spades.

Neither his coldness, nor that of Chelubai, lasted long. For one thing they knew me too well to be surprised at my uncompromising attitude to their design; for another, if they were on bad terms with me, they could not enjoy the society of Angel. For my part, though I resented their hopes, I bore them no malice for my refusal, and we were soon on our old terms.

I was for some time in two minds about telling Angel of their proposals; then one day, after trying to banish one of her fits of gloom by every

other device, I thought I might divert her mind from its brooding by the tale.

"By the way," I said carelessly, "I've been thinking that I ought to tell you that lately both Chelubai and Bottiger have approached me in my capacity of your brother with proposals for your hand in marriage."

I had judged rightly: it did stir her from her gloom. She started, flushed, and cried in utter amazement, "Marriage! Me! Me marry!"

"Even so; it's the way of all, or at any rate most, flesh."

"But-b-but I never thought of such a thing," she stammered, and the flush deepened.

"You didn't? And I've been considering you somewhat precocious. I suppose it comes from your living in such freedom from the contaminating influence of women. Well, Chelubai and Bottiger thought of it. And if you will do your hair up, these things will happen."

"But I—I never saw—I never thought that they were in—were like that."

"They are though. And what else could you expect?"

"I didn't expect anything!" she said quickly. "What—what did you say to them?"

"I rejected both of them—Chelubai on the ground that he was a professional philanthropist; Bottiger on the ground that he was of a reckless

and unbalanced nature, as shown by his always doubling spades at Bridge."

"I can hear your doing it," she said with a faint laugh. "Those are just the reasons you would find. What did they say?"

"They refused to be rejected; and both of them informed me, after my five years at the bar, too, that as soon as you were of age, you could marry whom you liked. I must say that either of them seemed fairly satisfied with his chance; but there must be too much hope somewhere, for you can't marry both of them."

"I'm not going to marry either of them!" she cried hotly. "And—and I think it's awful cheek!"

"Well, I think that is a wise decision, for if you have the chance, as you will have if we can scoop up the Quorley Granite Company, and set it going again, you ought to marry well, a well-to-do peer, or even a millionaire, if you can find one honest enough. But as for cheek, I don't see it. If you do up your hair, acquire a marriageable air, and take the hearts of men with beauty, what can you expect?"

She frowned, and said reproachfully, "I wish you wouldn't say things like that."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"You know you don't mean them."

"Oh, don't I though?" I said stubbornly; for

it seemed to me a nice, more than brotherly thing to say.

The frown cleared slowly from her brow and I heard a faint sigh. She fell to her brooding again; but I could see that it was by no means the cheerless brooding out of which I had stirred her, and I was content. In truth, I was more than content, I was glad that I had told her, for I had ascertained that her precocity was purely a precocity of the intelligence and not sentimental; she was at any rate fancy free. Moreover I had lost all resentment against Chelubai and Bottiger.

Things went quietly for a while. Outwardly there seemed to be no change in our relations; but I was dimly aware that a faint constraint was more and more changing the old brotherly and sisterly relations between me and Angel; and now and again I observed signs of a growing hostility between Chelubai and Bottiger. I thought myself bound to keep on friendly terms with Dolly Delamere, and twice or thrice I took her out to dinner and the theatre, but I began to long for the inevitable day when she would fall in love with one of her own kind and consign me to neglect and oblivion.

Then of a sudden we were wrenched from our quiet habit of life and stirred to a new, bustling activity by another philanthropic enterprise. One morning Chelubai received a letter from Honest

John Driver inviting him to lunch with him at the Savoy. We made no doubt that the King of Finance wished to make a business proposal, for if it were merely a social matter he would have invited Bottiger. Chelubai went to lunch with high hopes, and about the time he should have finished we gathered together in my rooms to hear his news.

All through lunch Honest John Driver talked, indifferently enough, of all that goes to the making of a sad dog, a part which, like most financiers, he seemed to affect out of business hours. But after lunch he came to the point, and said, "I needn't beat about the bush with you, Mr. Kearsage, I have a business proposal to make to you. I want my partner got out of the way for a few days."

"I'm afraid it can't be done," said Chelubai thoughtfully. "We have had dealings with Pudleigh once, and it is against our principles to remove the same man twice."

"Oh, Pudleigh! He's no partner of mine any longer. He pretended that I had robbed him over that Amalgamated Fertilizer business; and we parted," said Honest John Driver with contemptuous bitterness. "I allow no man to—to impugn my honesty. No: my present partner is Gutermann, Herbert Gutermann, a very gentlemanly young fellow, and a great friend of mine."

"I see," said Chelubai.

"That's why I don't want any violence. I don't want any knocking on the head or burning with kerosene. I merely want him kept away from the office and not allowed to write or wire between March the 1st and March the 10th."

"Um," said Chelubai gloomily. "That will be more expensive. It's so much easier and so much less dangerous to remove a man outright than to kidnap him. We could do that for £3,000."

Honest John Driver's face fell. "Is it really more dangerous?" he said in a vexed tone. "I should have thought it would have been safer."

"Oh, no, it isn't. We lay ourselves open to an action for false imprisonment or something of the kind."

Honest John Driver sighed heavily, and said, "Well, how much can you do it for?"

Chelubai seemed to consider; then he said, "Four thousand."

"Four thousand! And it's only three thousand to have him removed outright! A difference of a thousand pounds! Well"—he sighed heavily again—"I will go further than most men in the way of friendship; but business is business, and a thousand pound is a thousand pound. After all what is friendship but a name?"

"That's so," said Chelubai.

"No one could expect me to throw away money like that—just for a fancy—could they?"

Chelubai shook his head.

"Yet I should have liked to have gone on working with Gutermann. It's a strong combination, an Englishman and a Jew, a very strong combination. He's very resourceful, very, is Gutermann; and I stiffen his backbone."

"Then it's worth your while to pay another thousand to keep him," said Chelubai.

Honest John Driver's face suddenly lighted up, and he said: "I'll make it an extra three hundred, just out of friendship for him. I can't bear to think of his being removed outright, poor Gutermann."

They wrangled and haggled for twenty minutes, and at last Chelubai beat him up to £3,500. At that price they clinched the bargain, but Chelubai made a proviso that if it proved impossible to kidnap Gutermann, and we had to remove him outright, we should receive £3,000.

Then Chelubai said, "You've given us very little time, only a fortnight. What kind of a man is Gutermann?"

"He's a very gentlemanly young fellow and an ardent patriot. I know no man who thinks more highly of the British Empire."

"That's good," said Chelubai. "Does he drink or gamble?"

"Mr. Kearsage!" said Honest John Driver stiffly, and he drew his great flabby bulk upright in

his chair. "You forget yourself. I shouldn't dream of having a partner who is either a drunkard or a gambler!"

"Of course not! Of course not! I was forgetting," said Chelubai peaceably. "Is he susceptible?"

"If you mean to the charms of the fair sex, he is," said Honest John Driver, still wearing an offended air.

"That will do even better," said Chelubai. "You had better give a dinner here to-morrow night. I will bring Mr. Armitage and his sister, and you can bring Gutermann."

"And you'll bring Sir Ralph Bottiger?" said Driver eagerly. "It will—impress Gutermann."

"Yes."

We had been keeping under the eagerness with which we had been awaiting the coming of Chelubai by three rubbers of dummy Bridge. When he came we left our cards and listened to his tale. We were overjoyed to hear his news, for all of us were eager to be at work again. Even Angel was unfeignedly delighted, and I fancied that it was a relief to her to learn that it was merely a matter of kidnapping.

When the loud expressions of our joy had eased our hearts, we set our brains to work upon the business, and we set them to work hard, for a fortnight is a very short time to plan, arrange and

carry out such a delicate operation as the kidnapping of a wealthy and gentlemanly young fellow, well known in the city of London, even had we been careless of the consequences. And we were very far from being careless of the consequences, for Gutermann's race has the reputation of being litigious, and we had no mind that the Children's Hospital should lose in an action for damages the hard-earned gold of the reluctant Driver.

The Hertfordshire cottage seemed at once and to all of us the proper place in which to gaol Gutermann; but we cudgelled our brains in vain to find a pretext for gaoling him which would leave him without cause of complaint against us, or at any rate disable him from parading that complaint before the world. It seemed impossible to find, and after an hour's argument and discussion we got to Bridge to soothe our racked minds.

"Why? Oh, why didn't I insist on outright removal?" Chelubai almost wailed.

"I'm very glad you didn't!" said Angel sharply. "You'd no right to do anything of the kind till you knew for certain that this Gutermann is a wicked and objectionable person who deserves to be removed."

Chelubai bowed his head meekly to the reproof.

"Patience—patience," said I. "The resources of the intellect of the modern world are not yet so exhausted that it will not find a way. We have

not even seen our man yet; that dinner to-morrow night may give us the idea."

It gave us no idea; but we took the first steps to put ourselves into a position to give effect to the idea when it should come. We were kind to Gutermann, we encouraged the sallies of his harmless wit, and we listened to his wisdom with deference. It was not difficult to do, for he was quite a gentle, unassuming fellow, a happy contrast to the honest but blatant John Driver, who was in high feather and veritably teeming with the jokes of the school-boy. I was somewhat disappointed with Angel, for though it soon grew plain that her beauty had inspired a somewhat dazed admiration into Gutermann, she gave him only the barest civility, not one look or glance of encouragement. I wondered if this, too, were due to her change in the fashion of doing her hair. The dinner was a success; we learned the useful fact that Gutermann was very fond of Bridge, and we had made ourselves so nice to him that he accepted with effusion my invitation to come and play that game in my rooms on the following afternoon.

When we came back to the Temple, Angel threw off her cloak with a quick impatience, and sat down in her easy chair frowning and plainly in some disquiet. I lighted my pipe and waited for her to speak. Presently she said, "I don't like this business at all. Mr. Gutermann seems to me

quite harmless, not at all like the—the other subjects.''

'' No. I'm not nearly so keen on it as I was on the Blackthwaite and Jubb removals,'' said I, humoring her.

'' Those were quite right; we couldn't do anything else. And after all we didn't really remove them,'' she said with some content.

'' Well, not in the strict sense of the word; and we're not going to remove the gentle Gutermann either in that fashion.''

'' Still I don't see why we're helping Mr. Driver rob him. He's not objectionable,'' she said frowning.

'' That isn't quite what we're doing. We're only preventing him from taking part in some ingenious scheme for plundering the British Public devised by his partner. In fact we're doing him a moral service,'' I said.

'' I wish we could get out of it,'' she said.

'' We must think of the Children's Hospital,'' I said firmly. '' Every time a financier is balked Humanity is benefitted.''

'' But won't Mr. Driver plunder the British Public just as much? ''

'' Not just as much. Two thieves are thicker than one—they steal more. But of course the British Public will be plundered, and we can't

help it. It seems to think that that's what it's there for."

Angel sighed; then she said, "I wish it were Mr. Driver we were removing."

"So do I," I said heartily.

CHAPTER XVIII

A PAINFUL BUSINESS

Before a week was out Gutermann had every reason to believe himself intimate with us. He was a pale, gentle fellow, looking very little like the intrepid financier who could raven along with Honest John Driver and Albert Amsted Pudleigh. Indeed we were sorry that he never once showed the cloven hoof of the financier at the bottom of the well-fitting trouser-legs of the British gentleman: it would have made us feel happier about his kidnapping. He saw some, or all, of us every day; we dined with him and he with us, and we played many rubbers of Bridge together. His admiration of Angel grew and grew, a hardy flower that needed no fostering from her. It got none; and I reckoned her power of maintaining a civility so equal and so bare a proof of considerable genius. Her attitude excited my curiosity, and I asked her how she could bring herself to give him no encouragement, when a hopeless infatuation on his part might prove so useful to us.

She knitted her brow and her chin set somewhat obstinate: "I will never do it—never," she said

slowly. "It isn't so much that Mr. Gutermann seems quite harmless and so I don't want to take any of the blame for kidnapping him; and I'm not a bit sorry for having—having encouraged Sir Reginald Blackthwaite, and been civil to that objectionable Driver man. But I won't do it again, not to any one. I don't like—I don't want to."

"So the Company loses its most valuable asset, its most effective weapon, Humanity its most useful helper," I said sadly. "And all because you have done your hair up."

"I don't care," she said stubbornly, flushing a little.

"To be quite frank, I don't care either. In fact I'm very glad you won't."

She gave me a grateful look with no little surprise in it.

"I didn't like it ever," I explained. "Though I must say it sometimes amused me to see you letting that awful terror Sir Reginald Blackthwaite exercise his fascination on you."

"Yes," she said with a delightful smile. "It did amuse me, too. But under the amusement I felt uncomfortable somehow."

"I understand."

"You always do, I believe," she said, half with a sigh. "Though sometimes you hide your understanding extremely well."

"You wrong me: concealment is foreign to my

nature. But look here, I'm afraid that we've got to face the fact that we're getting a little tired of our philanthropic endeavor. After all we've set the Children's Hospital well on its feet."

"Do you mean that you want to stop?" she cried, and her face grew bright.

"Well, I find my enthusiasm for practical Philanthropy on the wane. I gaze upon the objectionable and the unobjectionable with indifferent eyes as long as they keep away from me. Perhaps it's the caution of age. I feel, too, that practical Philanthropy divorced from passionate enthusiasm has no adequate justification.

"Then the General Philanthropic Removal Company will come to an end!" she cried almost joyfully.

"Well as far as my resigning my directorship goes."

"And I shall resign mine, too," she said quickly.

"Then I think that will about smash it up, though it may always suffer a change—Chelubai and Bottiger may co-opt new directors. But what has become of your war with the world?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I don't feel about it as I did—after that horrible time."

We were both pleased by our unanimous weariness of practical Philanthropy, but we were of the opinion that we ought to help carry through the kidnapping of Gutermann. We could not desert

Chelubai and Bottiger in the middle of an enterprise. The difficulty was that we could devise no feasible plan. Every morning we met each other with hopeful faces expecting that one of us had hit upon a scheme; every morning we were disappointed. Then it was my luck to find the way. I was considering the methods we had followed in our other operations, how the loneliness of the town and country had alike served us, when it occurred to me of a sudden that we had utterly neglected our Island Heritage, the sea. In a very short time I saw my way to repairing this inexcusable neglect by carrying out our bargain with Honest John Driver. Chelubai was a yachtsman of the first order; he had gained a thorough knowledge of seamanship, trading in schooners about the Eastern Seas, and only last summer he had imparted much of that knowledge to Bottiger and myself during a two months' cruise up and down the West coast. It was not the time of year, or hardly yet the time of year for yachting, but we must lure Gutermann out on a premature,week-end cruise, and protract it for ten days. I wired to Chelubai to come to me at once, and he was with us very soon after breakfast. With his usual quickness he saw the advantages of the scheme and approved it. Two hours later he was off to Yarmouth to hire and equip a yacht.

It chanced that I was alone when Gutermann

came that afternoon to play bridge, and at once I invited him to join on the cruise.

"Next Saturday?" he said doubtfully, "I suppose I could be sure of being back on Monday night."

"Well, the sea is the sea," said I.

"Next week happens to be a very important week," he said, still doubtfully. "Who are going?"

"All of us—my sister, Kearsage, Bottiger and myself."

"It would be very nice," he said; and he sat down, lighted a cigarette and began to think hard.

I watched him, interested by the change in his face. As a rule his expression was gentle and even vacuous; now his face hardened, his lips set, and a very strong light of intelligence shone in his eyes. He said nothing for five minutes; then he smiled a very curious cunning smile: "I'll come," he said, "I shall be very pleased to." And his face was again serenely vacuous.

"That's all right," I said heartily; but I was a little startled by his smile. I wondered could he suspect anything; it was surely impossible.

I heard from Chelubai that he was working like a nigger to get the yacht ready, and on Wednesday I sent Bottiger down to help him. On the Friday evening Angel, I and Gutermann went down to Yarmouth, and we weighed anchor and started be-

fore breakfast on Saturday morning. Chelubai, Bottiger and I did most of the working of the yacht; besides us there were four deckhands, carefully chosen for their ignorance of seamanship. They would never know whether the protraction of the cruise were justified or not. The day was cold enough but sunny. Angel was at the height of delight; I had never seen her in such charming spirits; the sea, the bracing air, the bright sunlight ravished her, and little smiles of pleasure played without ceasing across her face. She seemed, confronted with this fresh and vigorous mood of Nature, to grow at once a natural part of it. Chelubai was subdued; the accomplished seafarer's distrust of the sea weighed on his spirit. I and Bottiger shared Angel's cheerfulness; Gutermann was merely uncomfortable.

The wind held in the Northeast all that day, and we beat up against it. But about the middle of the night it began to veer round, and before morning it was blowing half a gale from the southwest. This was the best of luck; and when I went on deck at six o'clock to relieve Chelubai, he said cheerfully, "If this holds for twenty-four hours, we needn't see land for a fortnight."

It held for thirty hours, now abating, now freshening again, but never very heavy. It was a poor thirty hours for Gutermann; he lay sea-sick in his stateroom. The steward and cook looked after

him, and the three of us went now and again and said a cheering word.

About noon on Monday he came on deck, looking pale and worn out; we gave him soup and champagne, and presently he fell asleep. At noon Chelubai took our reckoning and found that we were nearly four hundred miles from Yarmouth. All the rest of the day we enjoyed light and shifting breezes very convenient for Bridge; and Gutermann recovered enough to enjoy watching our game.

On Tuesday a steady breeze blew from the Northeast and Chelubai spent the favorable hours in tacking across and across the North Sea. We began to grumble at having been driven so far from land, but as yet Gutermann showed no anxiety. On the Wednesday we grumbled yet louder, and began to express doubts as to our getting back before Saturday. Still Gutermann was at ease and even cheerful. He played Bridge or dangled about Angel with perfect serenity. We could not understand it; for we had supposed that there was some matter of unloading shares on hand, as there had been in the case of Albert Amsted Pudleigh, and all Chelubai's knowledge of business could not suggest any other trick that Honest John Driver could be playing his unsuspecting partner. On the other hand we could not believe for a moment that Gutermann could be trusting that financial worthy to

unload his shares for him. We grew sorry for Gutermann, and were very kind and gentle to him. Even Angel relaxed from her bare civility and gave the poor unsuspicious fellow smiles to sun himself in. As the days passed and he still wore his untroubled air, we grew sorrier and sorrier for him. It spoiled the cruise for us.

We did not reach Yarmouth till the following Wednesday, having kept Gutermann out of touch with civilization for twelve days. We landed full of sorrow for the unhappy awakening which awaited him. We were just in time to catch a train, and had barely time to buy newspapers. We all had one, and were eager enough to learn the news of the world during the last twelve days. But when Gutermann unfolded *The Financial Times* and began to read it, all four of us watched him in an anxious breathlessness over the tops of our sheets. He ran his eye down the columns quickly, pausing here and there; then he laid it down, and took up *The Standard* with a contented smile.

"How's the city?" I said, in a not very assured voice.

"Oh, it's all right," said Gutermann cheerfully.

We looked at one another with questioning, unbelieving eyes.

All the way to town my purpose grew and grew. On the platform I told Chelubai what I wanted,

and, leaving Bottiger and Gutermann to take Angel home, he and I drove straight to the offices of Honest John Driver. We were ushered into the great man at once, and found him sitting before the fire, idle, with a half-smoked cigar in his mouth which had long gone out. His greeting lacked warmth, his air was dejected, and I fancied that his expression of brazen honesty had lost a little of its lustrous sheen.

We shook hands with him, and Chelubai said cheerfully, "Well, Mr. Driver, we've completed our contract. We have had Gutermann safely out of touch with civilization for the last twelve days."

The King of Finance raised his ponderous bulk from the chair, and stood frowning at us: "Never," he said, with heavy solemnity—"never let me hear that man's name again!"

"Why, what's the matter?" said Chelubai.

"The matter is that he's a rascal—a thoroughpaced rascal! A treacherous scoundrel! I've done with him! Done with him for good! I'm taking steps to have our partnership dissolved as soon as ever it can be arranged!"

His voice rose to an angry roar; his face flushed; his eyes sparkled with fury.

"What's he done?" said Chelubai.

"Done? He's sold me out—*me*—his partner and his friend!" His voice broke, and I thought he was going to sob.

"Never!" cried Chelubai. "How?"

"We had agreed to begin unloading our holdings in Golden Banks on the 2d, and go on unloading slowly till the 10th. Knowing that I had to be in Manchester on the 1st, he instructed his brokers to sell on that afternoon, and sell hard, and while I was in the train on my way back to town, the market was being knocked to pieces—to pieces! When I looked at the evening paper you could have knocked me down with a feather—and I'm a heavy man. And he was my friend!"

"Disgraceful! Scandalous!" said Chelubai, with warm sympathy. "What did you lose?"

"Lose?" said the King of Finance, and a tear stood in his eye, "every penny of sixteen thousand pounds! Why, when I began to sell on the morning of the 2d, it was as much as I could do to save myself from loss on what I originally paid for the shares. I did not clear seventy pounds on them."

"Um. Do you think he suspected anything?" said Chelubai.

"How could he?"

"Well, he knew what happened to Pudleigh."

"But that was quite different! He was in the whole of that business with me—barring that he didn't know that Pudleigh was out of the way. We did not sell a share before the day agreed upon; and even then when Pudleigh did not turn up in the morning, I insisted—yes, I insisted on giving

him three hours' grace before we began to unload."

"You may bet that's where he got the idea, all the same," said Chelubai.

"And saw his way to going one better," said I.

"Never mind," said Honest John Driver, with swelling dignity, "I have had my lesson. Gutermann was my friend—I trusted him—I may say, implicitly—and this is how he served me. I shall never trust again—never."

"A very wise resolution," I said, with hearty approval. "Between business men trust is misplaced."

"You are right, Mr. Armitage—quite right. But I know now—once bit, twice shy."

He fell into a thoughtful, silent gloom, pondering his wrongs. We, too, were silent, with the silence of sympathy, badly as I wanted to laugh. Presently, with a plain effort, he roused himself and said, "Well, gentlemen, I must not keep you; and I'm glad to have had the chance of letting you know what a rascal Gutermann is."

"We are glad to have been warned," I said gratefully, "and we should like our check."

"Your check?" said the King of Finance, with an excellent start of surprise. "What check?"

"Our check for three thousand five hundred for removing Gutermann out of touch with civilization from the first to the twelfth of March."

"I don't understand," he said, frowning upon me severely. "The purpose for which he was removed came to nothing; you can't expect me to pay over a failure."

"Your failure or success does not affect us," I said coldly. "We contracted to remove Gutermann, and we removed him; we want paying."

"But this is nonsense! I tell you I lost money!"

"That's got nothing to do with your bargain with us."

"But it has! We were all in the swim together. I only contracted to pay you if I succeeded."

"Now, you're not really going to talk nonsense to us, Mr. Driver," I said gently.

"Nonsense? It's only fair! If I win I pay you; but if I lose, I don't. It's—it's not honest to ask for it."

"Well, well," I said cheerfully, "we won't wrangle about it. You tried to let us down once, and it cost you over £2,000. This time it will cost you twice as much."

"You don't think you'll catch me again!"

"I don't think, I know I shall."

"I shall go to Scotland Yard at once, and put myself under the protection of the police," he blustered.

"You might as well put yourself under the protection of your grandmother, if you have one. If we find that the police prevent our getting hold of

you, and extracting our £7,000, I wouldn't give a lump of sugar for your life," I said, with a serene air.

He turned a little pale, and lost his brave air, but still he blustered, " Do I understand you to threaten me? "

" I don't know whether you understand it or not; but that's what I'm doing," I said cheerfully.

" That's so," said Chelubai. " The day you go to the police will be the best day you ever knew to make your will on."

Honest John Driver looked from one to the other of us with something of the air of a wild beast in a trap. " It's not fair! It's not honest! " he cried.

" I'm not in any great hurry," I said. " But it would save time if you gave us a definite answer."

" I won't pay! " he blustered, valorous again.

" Very good," I said. " We'd as soon do two jobs as one. Come along, Kearsage," and I moved to the door.

Our confidence shook him. " Wait," he said— " wait a minute."

" What for? " I said, opening the door. " Your answer is good enough for me, and kerosene is cheap."

" I—I tell you what. I'll pay your expenses, your out-of-pocket expenses." The bluster had gone.

I laughed a sinister laugh.

"Half!" he cried, still weakening. "Half!"

"You'll give me a check for £3,500 now, or £7,000 later," I said; and I laughed another sinister laugh, and went out of the room, followed by Chelubai.

He was shutting the door when the King of Finance ran to it, dragged it open, and cried: "Come back! Come back! I'll pay!"

We came back; and mopping the sweat from his brow, and swearing softly, he sat down at his desk and wrote out a check, payable to Bottiger, for £3,500.

"I don't think it's fair," he almost wailed. "If I'd not been betrayed by that rascal Gutermann, I'd have paid it cheerfully. But this isn't right. I do it on compulsion."

"Never mind," I said soothingly, as I put the check in my pocket. "You'll have another partner soon, and you'll need us again."

"Yes, and another time I'll have him knocked on the head! No more friendship for me! I wouldn't mind it half as much if I only knew that young swine, Gutermann, had been knocked on the head!" he cried savagely.

We were affable with him for a while, and tried to soothe his ruffled feelings. His last words were, "You don't know what it is to have been betrayed by a friend."

As we came down the stairs I laughed consumedly to think how the gentle Gutermann had defeated the rascal with his own weapons. At the bottom I said to Chelubai, "But he's an impostor —a gross impostor!"

"Oh, I don't think so," said Chelubai. "I believe he was sold out."

"I wasn't speaking of Driver," I said. "I meant Gutermann. Look at the sorrowful compassion he got out of us under false pretences."

CHAPTER XIX

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

I was exceedingly surprised to find how greatly I enjoyed the return to the quiet home life of the Temple, and I fancied that it was no less grateful to Angel. My enjoyment of it opened to my mental vision yet further vistas of domesticity in my nature, of which I had never dreamed. The constraint which had fallen on us after her fatal act of doing her hair up still lingered; I had not yet grown quite used to her change from a child to a woman, nor do I think that she was yet quite at ease in the new part. But I could see that the strangeness was wearing off little by little, and that in time we should settle down in the new relation. She was still afflicted by fits of brooding and gloom; but the cruise seemed to have blown her head clearer of cobwebs, and such fits were rarer.

We were all of us hurt by the duplicity of Gutermann. We could not get over the fact that he had obtained our sympathy and compassion under false pretences, and that our sorrow for his impending misfortunes had lessened our pleasure in

our cruise. Besides, Honest John Driver's check for kidnapping him had been honored; the Children's Hospital had another £3,500, and we had lost our philanthropic interest in him. We were, therefore, cold to him; Angel relapsed to her bare civility; I lost in heartiness; Chelubai no longer addressed him in affectionate American, and Bottiger no longer cheerily jarred him by slapping him on the back. The two last had grudged him Angel's compassionate smiles, and now they were even colder to him than she or I. We did not, indeed, break with him utterly, for we bore in mind that he was a Director of the Quorley Granite Company, and might yet again be useful to us.

He was grieved, as he deserved to be, by the change, chiefly, doubtless, by Angel's coldness. He endured in silence for a time, and then he came to me and asked what he had done to change us.

I eyed him coldly, and said, "We do not like the way you treated your old friend, Honest John Driver. He has told us how you sold him out over Golden Banks."

His large, gazelle-like eyes opened wide in utter surprise. "Why, that's b-b-business!" he stammered. "What's it got to do with us?"

"Driver was your friend, and you betrayed him," I said coldly.

He wriggled uncomfortably and looked unhappy; then he plucked up spirit and said, "The

old rogue is always whining about his friends betraying him. It's all lies; he has no friends. He's never worked a scheme yet with a man without trying to do him in the eye, and he's generally succeeded. You have to get there first with Honest John Driver; and I did. Who wouldn't? But even if he had been my friend, what has the city to do with one's social relations? ''

'' We're disappointed in you,'' I said sadly. '' If you go back on your friends in business, it is most probable you would go back on them in real life.''

'' No, no. It isn't so,'' he protested earnestly. '' Business is quite apart.''

I could not explain to him that he had already gone back on us, that he had obtained our sympathy and compassion under false pretences, which is no way to treat friends, and I had to seem to accept his explanation. But Angel and I did not restore him to our intimacy, though Chelubai and Bottiger warmed to him again, as soon as they were assured of Angel's coldness, for they thought that he might help the G. P. R. C. to further philanthropic operations. I fancied that they had designs on our good and worthy customer, Honest John Driver.

Now, since Angel and I were tiring of philanthropy, and losing interest in furthering the progress of the human race by removing the wealthy

objectionable, I grew eager to lay hands on the Quorley Granite Company without delay. But owing to the fact that so few of the shares had been put on the market, for all our steady buying we only held eight thousand. With Angel's forty thousand this did not give us control of the company, and I cast about how to obtain another three thousand shares before the annual meeting at the end of April. Honest John Driver held five thousand shares, and Gutermann had held five thousand, but had sold three thousand of them. It seemed to me that the time had come for Honest John Driver to part with a few of his. Then it seemed to me that I was old enough to try to thread the mazes of the business world without the help of Chelubai, and I resolved to try to rush Honest John Driver on my own account.

I went to see him in the morning, and he did not keep me waiting, which I thought a promising sign. But his greeting was stiff enough, even gloomy; mine was informal, with decorous sadness. I sat down in an easy chair, and said nothing; I only sighed twice, heavily.

"Well, Mr. Armitage? And what do you want to see me about?" he said grumpily.

"I've come on an unpleasant errand," I said slowly, weighing my words. "I want to break a piece of bad news to you gently."

He shifted uneasily in his chair, and looked at

me more closely. "I don't see what bad news you can have to break to me. We have no dealings together," he said, still grumpily.

"No; we have no dealings together at present, but we shall have shortly. The fact is, you have got in the way of some new customers of ours, and they are in treaty with us to get you out of it," I said, and sighed again.

Honest John Driver sat quite upright in his chair and stared at me: "I thought—I thought you were my friends," he said, a little faintly.

"You have so many friends," I said, thinking of Gutermann. "But you kept us on strictly business terms, if you remember, by always refusing to pay us."

"I wish I'd never set eyes on you!" he said, in the very accents of the truth.

"Now, you're ungrateful," I said gently. "We have put a clear twelve thousand pounds in your pocket."

"And had £7,615 8s. 6d. yourselves."

"Yes; we ought to have had more, I know."

"More! More!" he cried, in a choking voice. Then he pulled himself together and said, "Who are they—these new customers of yours?"

"I thought you knew that our motto was 'secrecy and despatch.' You've had the secrecy, and now you're going to have the—despatch," I said, with a playful smile.

His flabby bulk seemed to shrink somewhat, and a kind of grayness stole over his large face. "Is it Gutermann?" he said.

"I shouldn't tell you if it were."

"Is it the Pudleigh-Scarlett crowd?"

"I shouldn't tell you if it were."

"Well, what did you come about?" he burst out, with sudden violence. "Not to warn me! Did you think I was going to offer you more to let me alone? I won't do it! I won't! I won't! I won't! There'd be no end of it! I know what blackmail is! The financial Press I have to square! It's part of the game! But nobody else, s'help me! Nobody! I'll go to the police! I will, indeed! I'll tell them everything—everything!" I have never seen anyone look more like a cornered rat.

"Really, you tempt me to leave you to the Company," I said coldly. "If you had had the sense to hear me out, you would have learned that I had found an escape for you. Now you may go to the police, and be hanged to you!" And I rose, with a stern and haughty air.

I had not made two steps before he was grovelling. "Sit down, Mr. Armitage! Sit down, please. I meant no offence. I—I'm always ready to listen to a business proposition. What is it? What's the way out?"

I sat down, sulkily, in the armchair again, and he mopped at his brow; he was plainly in no train-

ing to let himself grow violent; it made him perspire.

"This is the situation," I said sulkily. "We know a crowd that is working against Pudleigh to get hold of the Quorley Granite Company, and they're stuck for want of three thousand shares. I have made clear to the chief of them—I saw no use in telling him that it was myself—that if one of the directors died, his shares would come on the market. He chose you as the proper director to die, because you hold five thousand shares, and so many thrown on the market at once would knock them down again."

"Yes, yes?" he said quickly, panting a little.

"Well, it seemed to me that if you would sell three thousand at eighteenpence to a friend of mine, you would be out of danger."

He laughed a shaky, quavering laugh, and mopped again at his brow. I saw the brazen honesty, which had been ousted from his face by rage and terror, stealing back over it, and he said, "You have introduced new methods into the business world! To think that I was to be sacrificed for a paltry block of three thousand shares in a dirty little company of Pudleigh's! Why—why didn't they come and make me an offer for them? I would have parted with them gladly—gladly." And the brazen honesty shone out on his face once more with the old triumphant lustre.

"Yes; at thirty shillings apiece," I said drily.

"No, no," he protested.

"Well, it's eighteenpence."

He coughed and eyed me carefully. "What's the market price?" he said softly.

"Eighteenpence."

"Well, don't you think three shillings"——

"No, I don't think in shillings to-day; I think in sixpences. It's eighteenpence or nothing," I said cheerfully, and I rose.

"Very well, very well, sit down," he said hastily.

"I've my friend's check for two hundred and twenty-five in my pocket. Let's get the thing over."

"You're so impatient," he said, almost fretfully. "A block of three thousand shares in a company like the Quorley Granite Company, a sound property, is not a thing to dispose of——"

"Look here," I said firmly. "I'm not an idle man, and I can't afford to waste my time. I want to go and play bridge. Hurry up."

In ten minutes I had the transfer in my pocket, and he had my own check for £225. He looked at the Roger Brand of the signature, and then he looked at me. But he said nothing about the identity of the Christian names.

When I said good-by he said, with real earnestness, "Good-by, Mr. Armitage, and if you'll ex-

cuse my saying so, you're connected with some of the worst frights I ever had, and I do hope I shan't set eyes on you again for the next five years."

"That's too much to hope," I said modestly.

I was half-way down the first flight of stairs when he came running to the top and cried, "About the check, Mr. Armitage—is it all right?"

"Quite," I said.

"That's all right. I trust you, Mr. Armitage, I trust you."

"Thank you," I said gravely.

But as I went on down the stairs I asked myself, had I realized one of my ambitions? Had I, or had I not, heard a financier sing?

When I came back to the Temple I told Angel of my success, and that she might now consider herself safely on the way of becoming a woman of wealth. I never lost an opportunity of speaking of her as a woman, because I saw that she liked it. But she did not seem as pleased as she might have done by the prospect of becoming a wealthy woman; she looked at me with doubtful, questioning eyes.

"What's the matter?" I said gently, for since she had developed her fits of brooding I had grown more gentle and less cheerful with her. "You don't seem pleased."

"I've got plenty of money, at least not plenty, but enough. I expect it will alter things."

"Well, if you mean that in a couple of years you will be able to have a box at the opera, and go off whenever you like, for as long as you like to any golf-links in the United Kingdom, it will."

"I don't mean that," she said, a little heavily.

"Well, one thing we can alter is the General Philanthropic Removal Company. We can wind it up this afternoon if you like."

"Oh, let's!" she cried, brightening.

Chelubai and Bottiger came round soon after lunch to play bridge, and I told them of my foray into the city and of the booty I had carried away with me, the 5,000 Quorley Granite Company shares. Chelubai, whose good opinion in business matters I prize, congratulated me warmly on my coup. "When a really imaginative man like Roger gives his mind to these things, he does get results," he said.

Bottiger said, "By Jove, you were smart. I should have liked to see the old brute part."

"The Children's Hospital is now endowed with thirteen thousand shares in the Quorley Granite Company; and I think the time has come to wind up the General Philanthropic Removal Company, or at any rate to change it into the Quorley Granite Company," said I.

"What?" cried Chelubai. "But why? What's the matter with the G. P. R. C.? There is no company existing which is doing such work for humanity!"

"I've come to the conclusion that as practical philanthropists we are failures," I said coldly.

"Failures!" cried Chelubai. "Why even looking at it from the business point of view the company has already paid over six thousand per cent. in dividends!"

"That is adopting a very base commercial standard of success, and I will not admit any such standard," I said severely. "We set out, as practical philanthropists, to further human progress by ridding the world of the less advertised objectionable people. Have we succeeded? No. Pudleigh still ravens through the world promoting companies. Sir Reginald Blackthwaite is brutalizing Karlsbadt with his anecdotes. Mrs. Jubb still moves about her restricted world in purple majesty. In the matter of Gutermann, we were hoodwinked, and he robbed the British public unscathed; instead of being firm and drowning him, we have let him go free to plunder it the next chance he gets. As philanthropists, practical philanthropists, we are failures. Let us face the fact frankly—like men."

On Chelubai's face rested an expression of mingled sadness and perplexity, and he said, "How with dividends like that, you can say——"

"I will not hear a word about dividends! Our work shall not be judged by a commercial standard!" I cried, in a terrible voice.

"No; it's philanthropy Roger's talking about, and we have failed," said Angel.

"Yes, yes; if you look at it like that we've failed," said Chelubai, with abject obsequiousness.

"We've had very bad luck. It might mend," said Bottiger.

"Well, you cannot expect my sister and I to continue in a branch of philanthropy for which our unfitness has been so fully demonstrated," I said firmly.

"No, no," said Chelubai.

"But of course we don't want to desert you utterly and suddenly," I went on. "We will resign our directorships and become sleeping partners if you like, consulting philanthropists, helping you with our advice in your enterprises, but taking no active part in them."

"But that would diminish the effectiveness of the company by rather more than two-thirds," said Chelubai.

"You underrate your enthusiasm," I said politely.

Chelubai shook his head.

"Well, there is another course we can adopt; we can change the company," I said.

"How?" said Chelubai, brightening a little.

"Well, these dividends, which were merely accidental results of our philanthropy and no measure at all of its success, seem to me to point out

the path for which we are really fit. As our failures prove that we have no real talent for practical philanthropy, so these dividends prove that we have real talent for business. I suggest, then, that the G. P. R. C. suffers a granite change, that we change it into the Quorley Granite Company. By working at that we can establish the Children's Hospital on a permanent basis, and restore an orphan's fortunes."

"This is talking," said Chelubai, with an extremely brainy air. "I've always been afraid that by some accident or other I might acquire bad karma from one of the operations of the G. P. R. C. But in an ordinary kind of company I shouldn't have any such fear. I should be much easier in mind."

"But—but—this is going in trade!" said Bottiger, with deep disgust.

"Really, that does come well from you, Bottiger. What were your ancestors but tradesmen? Their trade was murder for money or cattle," I said coldly.

"That was very different!" said Bottiger hotly. "It was the fashion in those days!"

"And now company-promoting is the fashion," I said sternly.

"It's no good bickering," said Chelubai. "What is your scheme for becoming the Quorley Granite Company?"

"Well, I can control the shares of Miss Pavis, forty thousand; the Children's Hospital owns thirteen thousand. So we control a comfortable majority of the stock of the company. We will turn out the present directors and go on the board ourselves. You shall be managing director, Chelubai, and Bottiger shall act as assistant manager. At first, to set the company going, you'll have to stay at Quorley."

Both of them looked at Angel.

"I don't want to go and bury myself in a hole in Cumberland," growled Bottiger.

"What about the theosophical lectures?" said Chelubai.

"You wouldn't let your theosophy interfere with your duty to Humanity. Besides, you won't have to leave London for any great length of time. A few months ought to set the company going all right," I said.

Both of them looked very glum.

"A summer in Cumberland would be delightful," said Angel.

"Would you come there, Miss Brand?" said Chelubai eagerly.

"Yes; we should probably come for a time, if it turned out a nice place, and there were any place we could stay at," I said quickly.

"I expect the fishing would be all right," said Bottiger, a little more cheerfully. "We'll all go together."

"Well, that is settled, then. The General Philanthropic Removal Company becomes the Quorley Granite Company," I said.

We discussed at length the procedure to be followed in the matter of seizing the control of it. But Chelubai and Bottiger were in poor spirits all the afternoon. I do not think that either found the prospect of honest work alluring; it lacked the romance of philanthropy.

The next day I had a long conference with Morton. He was indeed rejoiced to hear that I could control 53,000 shares in the Quorley Granite Company, and he agreed with me that we should seize the control of the company itself at the annual general meeting. He decided to buy 500 shares himself, and so qualify for the position of director. Thus we could have four directors out of five on the board, and we arranged that Gutermann should be the fifth. We arranged too many of the details of the actual seizure; we would try to make it as much of a surprise as possible, and with Pleever's help we believed we could make it a surprise. Albert Amsted Pudleigh might find himself off the board before he knew that his position was threatened and take steps to defend it. Doubtless, he would make a fight afterwards; but we did not see how he could prove that we had legally stolen Angel's forty thousand shares.

The next day I went to Gutermann's offices, and

explained to him that we wanted his help in electing us to the board, for I thought it well that he should be on our side. He was delighted to have the chance of doing me a service. Morton had an interview with Pleever, the secretary of the company, that evening, and next morning I had a letter from him to say that Pleever knew what he had to do, and was eager to do it.

April though it was, we were enjoying some days of spring, as the poets sing of it, not the real spring of east wind and sleet, but sunshine and balmy airs. It seemed to lift the cloud from Angel's spirit, and draw us closer together, almost to the old cheerful frankness which had reigned before she did up her hair. Never had a brother a more charming sister, never had our companionship been more delightful.

It seemed, too, that the springtide had awakened old memories in Dolly Delamere; for I received an imperious letter from her bidding me take her out to lunch. I obeyed it, and found her truly under the influence of the spring; she was veritably sentimental. I played up to her mood, as mere courtesy demanded, and we had a very pleasant lunch. After it we were driving westward down the Strand, when who should meet us in another hansom but Angel. I had not told her that I was lunching with Dolly, and when I caught her start-

led glance at us I wished for a moment that I had, and then I thought no more of the matter.

When I came back to the Temple she was in her room, and I took up a book. I was reading for review, lighted a pipe, and composed myself to my task. Once or twice I noticed that Angel seemed to be in something of a bustle, and I heard thrice a drawer sharply shut. I was thinking that it was about time we were going out to dinner, when I heard a cab stop below; presently lumping footsteps came pounding slowly up the stairs, and there was a knock at the door. I rose to go to open it, but Angel was before me. She opened it, and I heard her say, "I want you to carry my trunks down."

I could not quite believe my ears, trustworthy as I have always found them. I opened the door into the passage, and found her standing in it with her hat and coat on, watching the cabman hoisting a trunk onto his back.

"What is happening?" I said.

She half turned, but did not look at me. "I'm going," she said.

"Then what *has* happened?" I said.

"Nothing. But—but—I'm going. I ought to have gone long ago," she said, with solemn firmness.

I sighed, and said, "If you really think you ought, I don't see I can beg you to stay. I'm afraid

we ought to have bowed the knee to the proprieties as soon as we got Driver's first check."

"The proprieties have nothing to do with it!" she said sharply.

"Then why on earth are you going?" I said, in an unaffected surprise.

"I've been in your way long enough; I see it now."

"What nonsense is this?" I said.

"It isn't nonsense. I know now why that—that—girl never came again to tea."

"Oh!" I said, taken aback, and bewildered by the dazzling flood of light which poured in upon my mind. Then I cried hotly, "It's blazing nonsense! She didn't come, because I didn't want her!"

"Oh, yes, you did—you did, really. And—and you ought to have told me. It wasn't fair," and for the first time she looked at me, her gray eyes very dark and burning, her face pale.

I did not know what I had done to provoke this wrath, and before I could ask, she turned, and went down the stairs. I hesitated a moment, then I went to the top of them and called twice, "Come back."

She did not come, and she did not answer. I went back to the sitting-room, with my anger rising in its turn. What had I done to earn such treatment? I heard the cabman carry down her

trunks one after the other. And for all my anger at my unfairness, I nearly relented, and went down to bid her good-by. I could not bring myself to do it; I hardened my heart, and let her go. When I heard the cab drive away I went to the club, dined, and played bridge.

I could not keep my mind from Angel's amazing departure. Now and again the remembrance filled it, and made havoc of my play. I came back to my rooms gloomy enough, but when I entered the door the sense of their emptiness struck me with a veritable violence, and my heart sank and sank.

CHAPTER XX

THE QUORLEY GRANITE COMPANY

I AWOKE gloomy enough, and found my lonely breakfast a very cheerless meal. After it I set myself to think out Angel's departure, and my consideration of the matter gave me reason to call myself a fool many times. My blindness now seemed to me incredible. I could only think that my first impressions of Angel as almost a child, wearing her hair in a plait, had crystallized into a fixed idea about her, and that, like all fixed ideas, blinding. I was not so vain as to believe that she was suffering from a serious passion; but it was plain beyond disguising that she had been cherishing a girlish fancy for me. Why else had she shown herself so jealous of Dorothy Delamere? In what else lay the explanation of her fits of brooding and restlessness? In the course of a few weeks' absence the fancy would assuredly fade; but it hurt me a good deal to think that she had been suffering all this while through my stupidity. I could easily have set her mind at rest about that little lump of foolish vanity, Dolly. I could only console myself by the thought that if I had dis-

covered that fancy sooner our life at the Temple must the sooner have come to an end.

I turned to wondering what she was doing, and where she had gone. I had very little fear that, for all her beauty, she would come to any harm, for besides her earlier experience of London, she had learned a good deal more of life from us during the last months; her housekeeping had taught her the price of things; she had a balance of nearly twenty pounds in the bank; and that I could replenish. I began to wonder how long it would be before her anger cooled, and she let me know where she was. Then of a sudden an ugly doubt whether she would let me know where she was, at any rate for some time, chilled me. Knowing her as I did, I saw that though her anger might cool, her pride might very well keep her hiding away from me. I thrust the hateful thought away, and assured myself that things would not turn out as bad as that. I fell to regretting that she should be away from me and unhappy. A flight to solitude is no way to deal with unhappiness. Then I got gloomily to my work.

I did but little, and that bad. At one I went off to the club to lunch, with a strong sense of relief at leaving my desolate—desolate was the word—rooms. I had found Angel's absence distressing when she went away to attend to Mrs. Jubb; but then I had been sure of her quick return; this was

very different. I went out for a brisk walk round the park after lunch, and when I came back to the club I learned that both Chelubai and Bottiger had been looking for me, and I was reminded that I should have to find for them some reason for Angel's absence. I should not like to say that I avoided them, but it fell out that it was not till the third morning that Chelubai found me at home. After a decent amount of desultory talk about the General Philanthropic and Quorley Granite Companies, talk in which I took a snappish and cantankerous part, he asked me, with a timidity which looked very odd in him, where my sister was.

"She's gone away for a change. The spring in town is trying to growing children," I said, keeping as near as I could to the truth.

He sighed and said, "Will she be back soon?"

"I don't know, and I don't think that she has made up her mind."

"Where is she?" he said diffidently.

"I don't know where she is to-day, or where she will be to-morrow. She's on the move," I said, still hugging the truth.

"Where will a parcel find her? I've found some new chocolates, made by a new Italian, and they're quite wonderful. I want to send her a box."

"Then I shan't tell you where she is," I said firmly, seizing the chance. "For one thing, I will

not encourage you in filling the child's head with nonsense."

Chelubai protested sorrowfully, and then he protested angrily, but I was not to be moved. Bottiger, who assailed me later in the day, found me no less inexorable. Unhappy myself, I ought to have been touched by their unhappiness; but I was not; I rather hugged the thought of it to myself, and drew from it a cold comfort. And I was indeed growing unhappy; each day I was missing her more and more. I could not bear my rooms after twilight began to fall, and I hated coming back to their emptiness at night. I had never realized that she filled so much of my life. I began to learn, too, and late enough, that my fondness for her was a good deal more than brotherly. Assuredly, I was beginning to hunger for her as no brother hungers for the companionship of a sister. Once more I cursed myself for a blind idiot.

On the fifth morning I came to breakfast to find a letter from her lying beside my plate, and my heart leaped at the sight. I tore it open, and my heart sank to see that there was no address. It ran:

"I am disgusted with myself that I went away in such a horrible temper without thanking you for all you did for me. But I only seemed ungrateful, I was not, really. I do recognize that

I owe everything to you, and I am really grateful to you—ever so grateful.

ANGEL."

My hopes raised by the sight of the letter sank again; there was much too much gratitude in it for me. I read it again, trying to read between the lines. There was nothing to read between them; she was ashamed of her seeming thanklessness, and trying to make amends for it; that was all there was to it. But I was pleased that she did not seem to think that her actual anger needed defence; plainly she held to her right to take exception to my lunching with Dorothy Delamere, and I wanted her to hold to that right. But I was vexed and discouraged; I did not want her gratitude; I wanted much more, and above all, I wanted the opportunity of getting much more. To all seeming this opportunity was to be denied me.

I put the letter in my case, and looked at the envelope. The postmark was Euston, and one might post at Euston from Bloomsbury, or from North London, or starting on a journey. Plainly I was to hear no more from her for a long while. Should I set about seeking her? Since I could gain nothing by doing nothing, I would; and action might soothe the restlessness which was beginning to invade me. However, the affairs of the Quorley Granite Company grew pressing and filled my

days. There were conferences with Morton and Pleever; there was the careful mastering of the details of Pudleigh's deliberate mismanagement of the company, in case I should be called upon to arrange the present Board of Directors; and there was the arranging of our measures to secure the control. In this Pleever was one of the greatest helps to us. With a serene but senseless confidence in the underpaid, Pudleigh left all the matters connected with the Granite Company in his hands. He never interfered in the matter save to find fault with Pleever's work; and Pleever entered into our plans without a scruple. So it came about that Pudleigh never saw our special resolution to dismiss the directors and appoint new ones, and Pudleigh's nominees on the board, Pratt and Wiggins, were kept in an equal ignorance. I warned Honest John Driver by letter, and Gutermann by word of mouth, not to tell Pudleigh of it, though there was little chance of either of them meeting him; and it seemed likely that he would know nothing about it till he came to the meeting. We did not want him to try to allot the rest of the shares of the company to his clerks, or play any like financial trick upon us by way of giving needless trouble.

Two days before the meeting Pudleigh did give a little thought to the matter. He gave Pleever instructions to arrange that the two directors who

retired, by the articles of association, should be Driver and Gutermann; and when they presented themselves for re-election they were not to be re-elected, but two more of his clerks, Davis and Gay, were to be elected in their places. Also he bade him transfer Angel's shares to his name. Pleever asked for the transfer; but when Pudleigh told him that that would be all right, he said no more about it; only he waited for the transfer before making the change.

Though this affair kept my mind at work, my temper during those days grew worse and worse. I treated Chelubai and Bottiger with contumely whenever they introduced by roundabout ways the question of the return or the whereabouts of Angel, till they grew chary indeed of introducing it at all. And so far from my coming to feel sympathy with these companions in misfortune, for the time being I hated them for daring to share it. I preserved a cantankerous demeanor at the club, and I came to the meeting of the company spoiling for a fight, burning to dance on the prostrate Albert Amsted Pudleigh.

It was held in a room at the Moorgate Street Hotel, and the attendance was small. There was a little band of Pudleigh's clerks, three or four hangers-on of Honest John Driver and Gutermann, half a score of small, burred shareholders from the north, and ourselves. I had not seen Albert Am-

sted Pudleigh since the evening on which he had danced down the steps of Driver's office, and he had changed very little. Possibly he was a little greasier; the copper shade of his complexion was possibly a little darker; I could not be sure. But I was surer than ever that Chelubai's failure in philanthropy had been of no service to the world. I sat as near the directors as I could, for I wanted to hear Pudleigh when he read the Agenda paper.

Honest John Driver, honester than ever, called on Pleever to read the minutes of the last meeting, and when he had done Pudleigh rose and began the usual speech on the directors' report, or rather on the directors' lament on the conditions of the company. His soothing and apologetic statements were received with loud derision by the little group of shareholders from the north, worthies, doubtless, from the neighborhood of Quorley, who knew the quarry to be a good property, and had invested their savings in it. He grew very angry under their interruptions, and when he had done he had reason to grow angrier, for a savage old gentleman, with a strong northern burr in his speech, sprang up and abused him roundly for his disgraceful mismanagement of the company. Pudleigh's clerks tried to shout him down; they might as well have tried to shout down a northwesterly gale. His friends applauded him, and so did we. Pudleigh's little eyes moved quickly about the

room from one to another of us; and when the old gentleman had done, he rose, looking very truculent, and asserted that the directors had done everything in their power to make a success of the company.

Two or three more northern shareholders rose and abused him, and again he rose and said even more truculently that he had said his say, and that if the shareholders did not like it the remedy was in their own hands, they could elect fresh directors. He did not know it, but he was speaking the truth.

There was no little uproar, but after a while Honest John Driver declared the report passed. Then Chelubai rose and moved the resolution, of which he had given notice, to remove the present directors and appoint others in their places.

I saw Pudleigh snatch up the Agenda paper, look through it, and lean forward to Pleever.

"What's this? What's this?" I heard him say. "Why didn't you tell me about this resolution?"

"You wouldn't let me," said Pleever. "I came to you about the Quorley Granite Company last Tuesday afternoon, and you said you were too busy with South African Blacking to attend to the matter."

"You ought to have told me! What do I pay you for?" snarled Pudleigh.

Pleever shrugged his shoulders.

"Are the proxies all right?" said Pudleigh.

"They're quite regular," said Pleever.

Pudleigh sat back with an easy air, but he kept looking at Driver and Gutermann with no little suspicion. Then I rose and seconded Chelubai's resolution, and supported it in a short speech, in which I dealt with the maladministration of the company's affairs, and accused the directors of letting its business dwindle and dwindle with a view to getting the property into their own hands for a fiftieth part of its value.

We soon proposed and seconded our men, and after a dispute as to whether they were or were not elected by show of hands, got to voting. Pudleigh sat back with folded arms, plainly in the part of a copper-colored Napoleon of Finance.

But when Pleever read out the result—the election of Chelubai, Bottiger, Morton and myself by between fifty and sixty thousand votes—the little band from the north voted for us to a man—Pudleigh was indeed startled out of his conqueror's attitude.

"You dolt!" he muttered to Pleever. "Didn't I tell you to transfer the vendor's 40,000 shares to me?"

"I couldn't," said Pleever sulkily. "You never gave me the transfer."

Pudleigh sprang up and danced about like a

copper-colored india-rubber ball. "I challenge the votes!" he cried. "I demand a scrutiny! I hold the bulk of the shares in the company! I bought the vendor's forty thousand shares months ago!"

Morton rose and said quietly, "I represent the vendor. The shares have never passed out of her possession."

"It's a lie!" roared Pudleigh. "This is a conspiracy—a conspiracy to rob me!"

I rose and said, "Till that sale is proved, I propose to consider myself a duly qualified director, and to act as one."

"So do I," said Chelubai.

The little northern band applauded vigorously, and Pudleigh roared, "I shall fight this—right away to the House of Lords, if I have to!"

"I don't care," I said.

Again there was an uproar and Gutermann rose and came round the table to me, smiling. Pudleigh suddenly rushed round after him, and crying, "This is your doing, you dirty Jew! You think you're going to throw me out! But you aren't, and don't you think it!" He shook his fist in Gutermann's face.

I said very clearly and distinctly, "One more 'ug, ducky."

Pudleigh bounced round and stared at me with bulging eyes; his copper-colored face faded to a

red lilac, and then to a mottled mauve; he gasped and collapsed into the nearest chair.

"Now, look here, you rogue," I said, in a low, clear voice, "you set out to rob the wrong orphan. You've had one lesson from her friends down by the Oval; you're trying for another. Let up on it —let up on it."

He stared at me with unbelieving eyes, in which terror and malignity seemed nicely mixed. "My goodness!" he muttered. "My goodness!"

I looked well into his eyes till they fell, and then I said sharply, "You've had everything to do with this company you're going to have. You're out of it. And now make yourself scarce. Go home and keep out of our way. Get out!"

He rose, and looking back at me sidled, stumbling, to the door, and slipped out of it. I thought as it closed behind him that though the General Philanthropic Removal Company might have introduced new methods into business, they were undoubtedly useful ones.

CHAPTER XXI

A CONSOLIDATION OF INTERESTS

After Chelubai had been appointed Managing Director, and we had talked with the worthies of the Quorley district, assuring them of our resolve to have the company paying dividends before six months had passed, we came round to the Temple to discuss our next steps. I was for setting to work at once, for I was sure that we need fear no trouble from Pudleigh. I proposed, therefore, that Chelubai and Bottiger should go forthwith to Quorley and take the quarry in hand. They received the proposal in a glum silence.

"Come, come, don't shirk!" I said briskly. "Here you have a chance of doing honest work, such as you haven't done for years, Chelubai, and you, Bottiger, never in your life."

"What's the matter with the G. P. R. C.? That was honest work enough," said Chelubai, and he seemed hurt.

"That was not work at all—really. That was Philanthropy, a noble delight to us," I said firmly.

"But look at the dividends," said Chelubai.

"You don't get dividends without work," said Chelubai.

"There are some minds in which the accident always bulks bigger than the essential," I said, with some impatience. "However, it is not a question of philanthropy, but of your going to Quorley."

"It's all very well," said Bottiger, "but it means our burying ourselves in the country all the season. Why should we?"

"It's your duty to Humanity to establish the Children's Hospital in a sound financial position," I said.

"But I am doing my duty to Humanity by this philanthropy of the G. P. R. C. I don't want to do any other," said Bottiger.

Bottiger's intelligence is of a wearing type; but I only said patiently, "I thought we had wound up the G. P. R. C., but of course if you're going on removing alone, since I and my sister are out of it, I have no more to say. But Chelubai is far too conscientious to accept the managing directorship of a company and not throw all his heart into it and hustle. He will go to Quorley alone."

"I suppose I must," said the ever conscientious Chelubai, with no enthusiasm.

"Why shouldn't *you* go with him?" said Bottiger.

"I am not a gentleman of leisure. I have my work here," I said coldly.

Bottiger sat frowning, Chelubai sat gloomy, I sat silent, waiting for reason to pierce Bottiger's skull.

At last Chelubai's face brightened a little and he said, "If only your sister and you would come up for a few days, now and then, it wouldn't be so dull."

"Seeing that you go into exile for our sakes, it seems to me that the least we can do is to come and brighten it with bridge, as often as possible," I said kindly; and I only wished I might get the chance of bringing her.

"I think that the sooner I get a move on the Quorley Granite Company the sooner will your hospital pay dividends," said Chelubai, with grave seriousness.

"Yours is a noble heart, Chelubai," I said warmly. "Angel has always recognized it."

Bottiger looked at him with a sharp jealousy. "Of course there's the fishing," he said sulkily.

I took it to mean that he would go.

On the third day, without more ado, they went. They were to come down again if there was any trouble about our directorships; but we had reason to believe that there would be none. Albert Amsted Pudleigh had dismissed Pleever, indeed, but showed no signs of fighting us. Perhaps he saw

that our position was too strong, perhaps my happy allusion to the Oval had daunted for the time being his buccaneering spirit. We established Pleever, with a clerk, in two modest rooms at the top of a building in Chancery Lane, all the offices the Quorley Granite Company needed.

Now that this affair was settled, I found myself very much at leisure. I had my journalism, indeed, and the briefs came in; but journalism and the law barely filled my mornings, save when I was in court. I had all the more leisure to brood upon the loss of Angel.

As the days passed the sense of that loss by no means lessened, but rather I continued to learn, with more and more bitterness, how greatly she had filled my life, and what a gap her absence had made in it. Life, indeed, had again grown as trivial and unimportant a matter as it had been before she came into it. To think of the foolish carelessness by which I had let go her gracious and inspiring presence, set me raging at myself. Memories of her eyes, of her delightful smile, of her lips which I had never kissed, of the poignant tones in her voice, haunted me always, and consumed me with regret. Sometimes, when I was absorbed in my work, or lay awake of nights, I would hear her footfall in the passage or in the next room, and twice I awoke to hear her laugh dying away. Often a fever of restlessness wasted

me, and it was under its spur that I first set about seeking her.

The pursuit soon grew upon me. It fed the flame of my hope, and it soothed me with the sense that I was acting. I walked miles and miles in the north of London, all about Regent's Park, St. John's Wood, Camden Town, Kentish Town, and Hampstead. I spent hours wandering over the heath, because I had made up my mind that she would come to it for fresh air. I looked into the windows of the houses of each street as I went slowly down it, and time and again I could not get myself out of a street for the assurance that as soon as I left it she would come into it at the further end. Time and again I saw her in the distance, and hurried after her with a heart beating high, only to find a stranger. I came to my club to dine always late, I played bridge badly, but my partners endured my play, for I was holding the splendid cards of the unlucky in love. I never refused an invitation to go round to another man's rooms and play after the closing of the club, for always I strove to return at the last possible moment to the loathed emptiness of my rooms.

My temper grew uncertain, or rather certainly bad. I began to point out the mistakes of my partners at bridge to them with an excessive bitterness, and to resent their pointing out mine with even greater bitterness. I bullied mercilessly the

opposing witnesses in my cases. I was bearish—there was no other word for it—to my acquaintances; and when Dolly Delamere, wondering and angry at my neglect of her letters, descended on me one morning soon after breakfast, I saw in her the spring of my ill fortune, and quarrelled with her with a violence that drove her away in tears of mangled vanity. When I was not absorbed in my fruitless search for Angel, or in gambling, I went in a dull heaviness, forever cursing the tiresome emptiness of life.

Chelubai and Bottiger came down from Quorley for a day or two a fortnight later, on the pretence that they wanted a taste of town, really to see Angel. Both of them asked me what ailed me, and showed a concern at my haggardness which touched me the more that I had given them no sympathy in their disappointment at the absence of Angel. Of course, it was not as bitter as mine, because she had not, after all, filled a great place in their lives; but now I was sorry for them. Chelubai thought very highly of the Granite Company; Pudleigh had never let its output fall below the payment of its working expenses and the directors' fees; it was merely a matter of increasing that output. Chelubai was finding markets and to spare for that increase; he was renewing relations with old customers whom Pudleigh had ceased to supply, and already he saw his way to

a six per cent. dividend on the paid-up capital at the end of the year; and he talked with confidence of a fifteen and even twenty per cent. dividend on the whole capital in three or four years, since the property had never hitherto been developed as it should.

The coming of Chelubai and Bottiger lifted me out of my heaviness for the time being, and braced me to the point of resolving to strive to prevent life forcing its triviality upon my attention. They begged me to go back with them to Quorley for a week, assuring me that it would make another man of me. But I could not bring myself to leave London; the idea that Angel was in it was fixed in my mind, and the thought of missing that one chance in a thousand of finding her veritably frightened me.

But when they had gone, in spite of my resolve to be blind to the hopeless triviality of life without her, I soon fell into my former heaviness. It was not so heavy as it had been, and I began to see that if I did not want to come utterly to grief I had better take some effective measures. It seemed to me best to betake myself abroad as soon as the courts rose and try the exhilaration of the Continent. I made no doubt that in time I should recover my old cheerfulness, a bitter cheerfulness, perhaps, but still valuable. As it was, I was losing even the spirit to be cantankerous.

One night I left the club at twelve, and tempted

by the languorous June air blowing from the south, set out to walk home. I walked listlessly enough, and unthinkingly turned at the bottom of the Strand down Northumberland Avenue on to the Embankment. It was a foolish thing to do, for my mind at once filled with the memory of my first walk with Angel from Vauxhall on that inclement autumn night. I reached my rooms utterly dispirited, and opened the door with that sinking of the heart at their loneliness to which I had grown so used. I went into the sitting-room, groped for the matches on the mantel-piece, struck one, and dropped it, with a sharp cry; its light had shown me Angel sitting in her easy-chair, looking at me with a white, strained face. I stood quite still, utterly taken aback, striving to collect my wits, scattered by the shock; then I said, in a trembling voice I hardly knew for my own, "Why—why—have you come back?"

"I couldn't—stay away—any longer," she said, almost under her breath, but not so low that I did not catch the spent weariness of her tone.

A flood of joy surged through me, overwhelmingly. I fell on one knee beside her, caught her hands and kissed them again and again, murmuring, "Oh, why did you go away—why did you leave me?"

I felt her stiffen at the touch of my lips, and then relax to my kisses. Then she began to sob, slowly and heavily. I put my arm round her and

drew her to me; for a breath she held back, then leaned forward, threw her arms round my neck, and our lips met.

I was drunken with triumphant joy. I kissed her lips again and again; I kissed away her tears, and then I lifted her out of the chair, sat down in it, and took her on my knee, murmuring endearments and reproaches. It was a while before we were really in our senses and coherent. Then I learned that she had been lodging at Chislehurst, trying to soothe herself with long walks into the country at her gates; and I gathered that she had been in no better case than myself, in worse, indeed; for on the edge of the country she had been defenceless to the spring, and the spring is no time for lovers to be parted.

She ended by saying mournfully, but her regret did not ring very sincere, "And I had to come back—I had to—and I shall always be ashamed of myself—always."

"What we want, and what we'll get to-morrow is a special license," I said firmly.

"A special license—what for?"

"To get married in the afternoon."

"To-morrow—oh, no!" she cried. "That would be too soon! I am not ready! I should have to get things!"

The library clock struck two.

"You mean you'll be married to-day," I said; and I hugged her and laughed joyfully.